

MARINE FIGHTER/ATTACK SQUADRON 115
 FLIGHT SCHEDULE FOR 17 SEPTEMBER 1970

ODO: 0700-1200	LT ZAHL	SR: 0636	A/C AVAILABILITY
1200-1800	LT STACY	SS: 1847	0600 6
1800-0600	LT ZAHL	MR: 2009	2400
		MS: 0806	FORECAST
		IL: 96%	

EVENT	A/C	TIME	CREW	TYPE	BRIEF	TOT	ORDNANCE	REMARKS
250	06	.6	CAPT MILLS/LT MAY	CAS	0800	0930	9D2DC	NOTE #2
6250	03	.7	COL POMMERENK/CAPT HOLMBERG	"	"	"	"	
458	09	1.1	LT RISSEL/LT DEINES	CAS	1030	1200	6D2A/3D9	
6458	01	1.1	LT BACON/LT BRGWN	"	"	"	"	
460	06	1.1	LT MONESMITH/LT GREEN	CAS	1200	1330	6D2A/3D9	
6460	08	1.1	LT STEVENS/LT WITTER	"	"	"	"	
464	11	.8	MAJ GAGNON/LT SANTONI	CAS	1330	1500	12D2WY	NOTE #3
6464	03	.8	LTCOL MITCHELL/CAPT HOLMBERG	"	"	"	"	
466	06	.8	LT ZAHN/LT ROBINSON	CAS	1500	1630	12D2WY	NOTE #4
6466	11	.8	LT DEMPSEY/LT CONNER	"	"	"	"	
212	C N X		LT HUGHES/LT WITTER	TFQ	1600	1700	12D2WY	
6212	C N X							
216	09	1.5	MAJ REESE/LT MAY	TFQ	1900	2000	12D2WY	
6216								

 MORNING PAD: 0700-1200 BRIEF: 0645 2 A/C D16/D17

A. MAJ REESE/LT FUCHS _____ B. MAJ BERWALD/LT ROBINSON _____
 LT ZAHN/LT SANTONI _____ LT DEMPSEY/LT WITTER _____

 AFTERNOON PAD: 1200-1800 BRIEF: 1145 SAME AS MORNING PAD

A. CAPT MILLS/LT STACY _____ B. MAJ REESE/LT DEINES _____
 LT HEELY/CAPT JOHNSON _____ LT BACON/LT BROWN _____

 EVENING PAD: 1800-0700 BRIEF: 1745 SAME AS MORNING PAD

A. LT ZAHN/LT ECKHARDT _____
 LT CAPITO/LT WITTER _____

- NOTES: 1. EOD - ENGINE FAILURE DURING TAKE OFF.
 2. BACK UP AIRCRAFT REQUIRED.
 3. MAJ GAGNON GIVE INSTRUMENT CHECK TO LTCOL MITCHELL.
 4. CHECK WITH MAINTENANCE AND IF A/C AREN'T NEEDED FOR TFQ'S, RUN INTERCEPTS.
 5. INTERCEPT BRIEF FOR ALL AVAILABLE RIO'S IF READY ROOM AT 1600.

G. A. Zahn Jr.
 G. A. ZAHN JR.
 FLIGHT OFFICER

Section (1)

Actual flight schedule for the Silver Eagles for operations out of Da Nang. Note the columns "A/C" and "Time" with the aircraft side numbers and flight hours flown, respectively.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A422879

A flight of Silver Eagle F-4Bs is airborne on a mission in Vietnam during January 1971. Each is carrying a load of Sparrow and Sidewinder missiles, and laser-guided bombs.

and 218 enlisted men, and on that day it moved back to Iwakuni, Japan, rejoining MAG-15 there. Arriving with eight F-4Bs, the squadron added seven more to bring its aircraft strength up to 15.

Three days later, on 4 March, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond R. Powell became the new commanding officer of VMFA-115.* A significant change in the squadron's maintenance procedures occurred as the unit adopted the Visual Information Display System to record its maintenance operations. Tactical flying resumed on 25 March, when two aircraft participated in the Commando Jade exercise.

Spring months were used to concentrate on aircrew training in the area of ACM (air combat maneuvering) and radar practice, anti-submarine warfare, Sidewinder missile firing, and in Okinawan joint air defense exercises.

Starting 30 June, the aircraft of VMFA-115 moved to Cubi Point. There the squadron carried out intensive training, which included providing simulated close air support for the 31st Marine Amphibious Unit's landing exercise until 22 August.

For the remainder of 1971, while primarily based at Iwakuni, the squadron concentrated on pilot training in the areas of air-to-air tactics, gunnery, close air support, long-range bombing missions, etc. The Silver Eagles also made a return visit to Cubi Point during the period 19 October to 18 November.

On 9 December 1971 Lieutenant Colonel Kent A. McFerren took charge of the squadron as command-

*As a captain, Lieutenant Colonel Powell had been Marine Corps Aviator of the Year in 1965.

ing officer, and the latter part of the month saw extensive preparation for a projected move to Naha, Okinawa.

The superior work of VMFA-115 during 1970-1971 was recognized when it received the prestigious Robert M. Hanson Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron of the Year Trophy. This award recognized the squadron as the "best" VMFA unit in the Marine Corps for the fiscal year. It was also awarded the Navy Unit Commendation as part of MAG-11 for roughly the same time period.**

The move to Naha took place on 7 January 1972, and VMFA-115 remained there for three months of training. The Naha training came to an abrupt end in April, due to the 29 March invasion of three North Vietnamese divisions across the northern border of South Vietnam. This onslaught was known as the "Easter Invasion." The situation along the DMZ deteriorated rapidly, and U.S. reinforcements quickly became necessary. A policy decision was made to limit these to air units. Thus, on 5 April, 1st MAF received a warning order from FMFPac to be prepared to deploy two fixed-wing tactical aircraft squadrons to Vietnam. VMFA-232 and VMFA-115 were selected because of their dual-mission capabilities and interoperability with Air Force aircraft. On the morning of 6 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued an execute order. Immediate action was taken to stage the two squadrons to Cubi Point to await the final execute order from the commander of the Seventh Fleet, and by noon the first aircraft elements were airborne from Iwakuni. At

**See Appendix D for citation.



Marine Corps Historical Collection
LtCol Raymond R. Powell, commanding officer of VMFA-115, receives the Hanson Trophy on behalf of the squadron for its performance for Fiscal Year 1971.

1744 the final execute order was received by 1st MAW, and in four hours and 55 minutes the lead elements of both squadrons were at Da Nang.¹⁷

The scrambling efforts to accomplish this were revealed in comments made later by Lieutenant Colonel McFerren. He had no word of the decision to move until 0900 on 6 April. He was at Iwakuni, the squadron was at Naha, and the squadron's aircraft needed to be reconfigured with wing tanks for the trip. Yet, in spite of the temporary disorder, the lead elements were in Da Nang by 2200 hours.¹⁸

In Da Nang the squadron was attached to MAG-15 (Forward), and given a two-day "in-country" indoctrination on the enemy and friendly situation by a Seventh Air Force briefing team. Missions began on 9 April with the primary objective of providing close air support for the South Vietnamese Army. Sorties were concentrated in the areas around Quang Tri, Hue, Pleiku, Kontum, and Phu Cat. The squadron lost its executive officer, Major Thomas K. Duffy, in a midair collision with a South Vietnamese observation plane on 27 April. Amazingly, his RIO, Captain Darryl F.

Dziedzic, was able to eject and escaped the accident with only minor burns.

By the end of May the squadron had flown a total of 504 combat sorties and 593.5 flight hours.

Lieutenant Colonel McFerren, in analyzing the sorties of VMFA-115, later made several interesting points. Electronic counter-measures were not required in MR 2 (Military Region 2) but were necessary in MR 1. Any bombing closer than 1,000 meters to friendly troops had to be specifically authorized (compared to the 50-meter zone the squadron had used with U.S. units on its previous tour).^{*} Still, VMFA-115 had done "as good a job as F-4s have ever done."¹⁹

Thailand Deployment

On 16 June 1972 the squadron began another move to a new base. The reasons were two-fold. Marine Corps planners were concerned that continued enemy progress would jeopardize the security of the Da Nang Airbase. Further, President Nixon had ordered a reduction in the number of U.S. troops in South Vietnam. As a consequence, "out country" locations in Southeast Asia had to be chosen from which American air units could continue flying their support missions. For VMFA-115 and the rest of MAG-15 the Nam Phong Royal Thai Air Base was selected.¹

Accordingly, on 16 June VMFA-115 launched combat sorties from Da Nang, and recovered 340 miles west at Nam Phong, Thailand. It was the first combat squadron of the recently established Task Force Delta to arrive there.^{**} The air base at Nam Phong was primitive; in May it had been described as little more than a stand-by runway. The runway and four F-111 "nose hangars" were the only facilities in place, and thus the entire squadron had to operate out of one of the "nose hangars."² It was facetiously known as the "Rose Garden," a nickname which came from a Marine Corps recruiting slogan that itself had been taken from a popular song of the time. It carried the idea that the Marine Corps didn't promise a luxurious life style! Nevertheless, the men of VMFA-115 were

^{*}The planes used a 10-degree approach angle at 500 feet to drop their 500-pound Snakeye bombs; this meant an error as small as one degree in dive angle would put the bomb 12 to 15 feet off target. This led Lieutenant Colonel McFerren to believe that Marine aircraft could do a better job if they used the laser-guided "smart bomb" the Air Force was using.

^{**}Task Force Delta, initially commanded by Brigadier General Andrew W. O'Donnell, was established on 24 May 1972. Its purpose was to "assume operational control of MAG-15 except that the 7th Air Force Headquarters in Saigon would have mission direction authority." It was also to "establish and maintain liaison" with the Seventh Air Force and Royal Thai Air Force.

happy to get away from Da Nang and its constant threat of rocket attacks.³

Living conditions at the "Rose Garden" were decidedly uncomfortable in the beginning. There were 10 men to a tent, few fans, summer temperatures over 100 degrees, high humidity, and a shortage of fresh water.⁴

Still attached to MAG-15, the squadron flew its first combat mission on 17 June. Lieutenant Colonel McFerrer felt, however, that the move was made "30 days too soon," since only some of the C-130s needed for logistical support were available, and there was insufficient IMA (Intermediate Maintenance Activity) support for six days due to lack of equipment. This translated into mechanics cannibalizing parts and working at night with flashlights in their teeth.⁵

Because of the distance to target areas in Vietnam, the F-4Bs of the squadron would rendezvous with the KC-130 tankers of VMGR-152 and conduct aerial refueling as standard procedure for their missions, a method which worked well and was much envied by USAF fighter pilots.⁶

Flying interdiction missions in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the squadron's Phantoms took enemy ground fire nearly 70 percent of the time. They would take off from Nam Phong, check in with an orbiting Air Force C-130 control center, and then be passed along to a FAC(A) (Forward Air Controller, Airborne) in an OV-10 who actually pin-pointed the exact targets. Sometimes the Air Force planes would provide LORAN (Long Range Aid to Navigation) bombing fixes when the weather was so bad that targets were obscured and visual bombing was impossible. Since the Marine F-4s did not have LORAN, an Air Force F-4 would fly from its base at Udorn and accompany the planes of VMFA-115 to the target area, providing the necessary radar fix while the Marine pilots dropped their bombs.⁷

After operating out of varied locations during the period 1 January 1972 to 30 June 1972, VMFA-115 had compiled totals of 1,128 combat flight hours; 2,592 total hours flown; and 1,955 sorties.⁸

On 24 June the squadron's executive officer, Major Gerald De Jong, took over for a month as interim commanding officer of the squadron. He resumed the duties of executive officer when Lieutenant Colonel Henry C. Ivy, Jr., took command on 23 July.

During the summer, VMFA-115 altered its operations to begin flying close-air-support missions for friendly forces rather than the direct-air-support missions of previous months. In addition, sorties were substantially increased by a change in operating

procedures. Omitting tanker refueling, the F-4Bs flew an initial mission from Nam Phong, landed at Da Nang to rearm and refuel, and then flew a second mission prior to returning to the "Rose Garden."

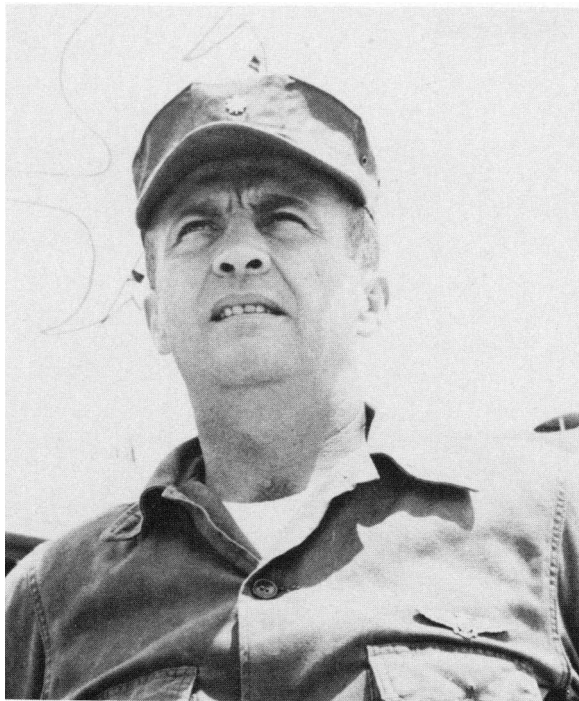
At the same time the squadron began to reorient its ground and air training program. The focus turned to air-to-air tactics, with briefings for BARCAP missions, and a review of the advantages and disadvantages of the F-4 and Soviet Bloc aircraft in air-to-air combat.⁹

The field conditions at Nam Phong continued to be an important factor in the life of the squadron. Some years earlier, Marines had helped to establish the air base at Udorn, 52 miles north, but it had been taken over by the Air Force. This town was now regarded as a "class, uptown" spot by Nam Phong Marines who went there for two-day liberties. At Udorn they saw the modular housing, PXs, showers, air-conditioning, and other comforts enjoyed by Air Force personnel. This difference in living conditions was a common subject of discussion among the Marines, something quite understandable when contrasted with the laborious efforts to establish even an officers club at Nam Phong.*

Commenting on these months, Lieutenant General O'Donnell later stressed that there should be no impression that the Marines were "disgruntled" or "unable to accept living in field conditions." The situation at Nam Phong was "far better than we had at Da Nang in late 1965 and early 1966" in his judgement. He also added that "the reason that there was no 'O' club was [that] no 'E' club or staff club [existed for the enlisted men]. Tenure at Nam Phong was to be only 90-120 days. This period was extended in 30-60 day increments."¹⁰

September marked another milestone for VMFA-115 operations in Vietnam. The squadron completed its 32,000th combat sortie. Official recognition came the next month when Lieutenant Colonel Ivy published to all hands a message from General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., Commandant of the Marine Corps. It announced that VMFA-115 had won the Robert M. Hanson Award as the outstanding Marine fighter squadron for the second year in a row. The citation mentioned factors such as superior performance, noteworthy resourcefulness, flexibility, determination, and professionalism.¹¹

*The Nam Phong Officers Club required nine months' continuous paperwork effort and "ended up on the desk of the Chief of Staff of the Marine Corps [sic]" at Headquarters in Washington, D.C. When finished it consisted only of a cement slab with 8-10 poles supporting a thatched roof, with a railing but no walls.



VMFA-115 Command Chronology Photo
LtCol Henry C. Ivy, the commanding officer of VMFA-115, at Nam Phong, Thailand, in 1972.

The changing status of the war was reflected in the termination of BARCAP missions and cessation of strikes above the 20th parallel on 23 October, but support for South Vietnamese forces continued in MRS I and II, as well as the Steel Tiger and Barrel Roll operational areas in Laos.

By November the squadron's command chronology took note that "with a 'cease fire' for Southeast Asia imminent," the squadron still had "its finest operational month since returning to combat." Combat flight hours reached 650.3, and 1,096 tons of ordnance were delivered. The onset of the monsoon season made a significant impact on squadron operations, requiring the extensive use of TACAN (an ultra-high-frequency electronic navigation system) for navigation and radar bomb drops.

Continued success under these difficult conditions brought a message of congratulations to VMFA-115 from Major General Leslie E. Brown, Commanding General, 1st MAW, and a former commanding officer of the squadron. His message cited the sharp improvement in aircraft availability, as indications of the unit's skilled management and professional dedication. On a similar high note, the Marine Corps' Birthday was celebrated with T-bone steaks and free beer.

The month of December closed out 1972 with a variety of events for VMFA-115. Close and directed air sup-

port were provided to the South Vietnamese and Royal Laotian forces, and BARCAP missions in support of air operations against North Vietnam were resumed. This latter situation reflected the suspension of the Paris peace talks to end the war. Yet, while combat requirements had intensified, the final week of the year ended with two relaxing events: a live entertainment show featuring Bob Hope and a day off for all hands to mark a Christmas 24-hour ceasefire.

In summarizing the last six months of 1972, 1st MAW noted that VMFA-115, along with VMFA-232, "had the highest daily sortie rate of all F-4 units in Southeast Asia."¹²

The squadron continued to demonstrate its effectiveness during the first six months of 1973, even though its personnel strength had been reduced to less than 200 men. On 14 January, combat sorties into North Vietnam were suspended, and on 27 January air operations in all of Vietnam halted. At the time, VMFA-115 had amassed a total of 33,553 combat sorties in Southeast Asia. Because of the ceasefire in Vietnam, the first three weeks in February saw all missions being devoted to operations in Laos, the most significant of which was Black Lion IV. A happy note in interservice relations during the operation occurred when an Air Force forward air controller sent a plaque and Laotian flag to the squadron with the following comments:

These tokens only partly reflect how much you did to help us during the Black Lion operation around Pakse. When you guys say that close air support is your business, you don't kid around I know it, the ground-pounders know it, and the NVA know it"¹³

On 22 February a ceasefire for Laos went into effect, and the squadron, for the first time in almost a year, exclusively launched training sorties. These flights centered on day- and night-intercept training, ACM tactics, and aerial refueling. Practice continued into March. Meanwhile, the command chronology revealed the squadron's main expectation when it stated that the "Silver Eagles prepared for possible redeployment to Iwakuni, Japan."

That was not to be the case. On 30 March, VMFA-115 again commenced combat operations, this time in support of the Cambodian government.** Training sorties also continued to be flown; briefings were given on F-4B vs. MiG series aircraft; the squa-

*VMFA-115 participated in the award of a Navy Unit Commendation to Task Force Delta for the period 23 May-31 December 1972. See Appendix D.

**These were long missions requiring air-to-air refueling from KC-130s enroute and often on return.



Marine Corps Art Collection by Maj John T. Dyer, USMCR, "Clean Up," Nam Phong, Thailand
Thai workers clean a Silver Eagle Phantom at the "Rose Garden" during July 1973.

dron participated in Air Force exercises simulating MIGCAP and BARCAP; and from 28 May to 8 June, a partial deployment was made to Cubi Point to conduct a missile FirEx (fire exercise).

The last half of 1973 brought some major changes for VMFA-115. A new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Charles V. V. Smillie, Jr., took over on 2 July, and of 32 squadron officers present, 18 were replaced with new personnel. Air operations in Cambodia were halted after 15 August, the last of all U.S. operations in Southeast Asia. VMFA-115 had flown a total of 693 combat sorties from Nam Phong, and 34,010 sorties during its entire Southeast Asian tour, figures that were higher than any other Marine F-4 squadron. At long last, preparations began for a departure from the "Rose Garden."

On 31 August, VMFA-115 left Nam Phong and, after making a refueling stop at Cubi Point, arrived at Naha the same day. At Naha the squadron undertook an extended training program in ACM, radar intercept tactics, gunnery, air-to-ground ordnance delivery, and close-air-support exercises with the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines. On 17 December 1973, after a 20-month absence, VMFA-115 returned to its old home base at Iwakuni, still part of MAG-15.

Japan Again—U.S. Again

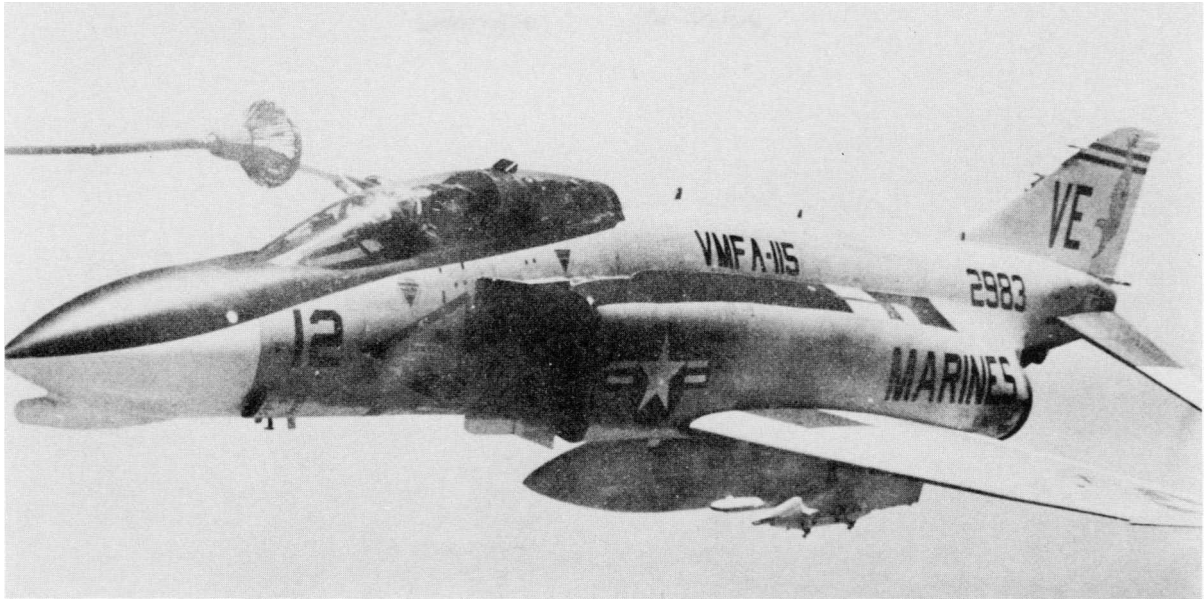
Back in Japan again, VMFA-115 launched a series of training programs. During January 1974 the squadron concentrated on dissimilar air-to-air tactics.* These involved two-on-one engagements using H&MS-12 TA-4s as adversaries. There were also operations in support of Navy ships.

Similar missions were conducted throughout the first half of the year, as VMFA-115 continued its pattern of constant deployment, working from Iwakuni, then Cubi Point (9 February-27 March), and finally Naha (starting on 12 June).

Major Alec Gillespie acted as squadron commander from 20 June until 16 July, when Lieutenant Colonel Harvey D. Bradshaw took charge.** The squadron continued commuting between Iwakuni (19 August-21 October), Naha (leaving there 18 August and returning 22 October), and Cubi Point (3-9 December). Time on Okinawa was spent in air-to-ground ordnance delivery (including TPQ-10 control), aerial refueling practice, and ACM sorties against dissimilar aircraft

*Dissimilar training allows practice against planes different from the F-4, which can demonstrate characteristics like those of potential hostile aircraft.

**In 1977, as now-Colonel Bradshaw, he received the Alfred A. Cunningham Award as Marine Aviator of the Year.



VMFA-115 Cruise Book Photo

Aerial refueling of a VMFA-115 Silver Eagle is accomplished during a training flight in 1975.

(TA-4s and AV-8s). In addition, VMFA-115 participated in several joint service exercises. In one of these, the squadron's F-4Bs simulated the Soviet SSN3 missile. During this deployment, on 19 October, the squadron lost an aircraft when a plane caught fire on takeoff and crashed into the ocean. The crew, however, safely ejected.

The hard work and superior achievements of VMFA-115 were recognized when it was notified that it had received both the Marine Corps Aviation Efficiency Trophy for 1973-74, as well as the Chief of Naval Operations Safety Award. These were notable accomplishments, since the Aviation Efficiency Trophy was intended to signify the "best" squadron in all of Marine aviation. The CNO Award was also highly regarded, since only three or four Marine squadrons would qualify to receive it each year.

With the start of 1975 all hands packed up for a return from Naha to Iwakuni. There the squadron began intensive training in field carrier-landing practice in preparation for carrier qualifications.

On 1 March Major General Norman W. Gourley, Commanding General, 1st MAW (and a second lieutenant in the squadron 32 years earlier), presented the CNO Safety Award to VMFA-115. Two days later the unit was off to Cubi Point again in order to conduct carrier-landing qualifications on the carrier USS *Enterprise* (CVA[N] 65) on 12-13 March. After the carrier qualifications, it returned to practicing ACM sorties against A-4s, A-7s, F-4s, and F-14s, supplemented with TPQ-controlled missions and missile-firing exercises.

On 10 May all of the squadron was back at Iwakuni, where it concentrated on preparing for transition to the F-4J model aircraft. On 5 August the squadron received a new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Donald D. Wilson.* Four days later 14 F-4Js were delivered to the squadron, and VMFA-115's first flight in the new plane took place on 19 August.**

The changeover to the F-4J brought the squadron a plane with many improvements: the AJB-7 bombing system, the AWG-10 pulse Doppler radar fire control, a data-link system, and a J79-GE-10 engine with 17,900 pounds of thrust in afterburner.

The new era for the Silver Eagles was marked by a visit from Lieutenant General John N. McLaughlin, Commanding General, FMFPac, on 21 August.

A two-month deployment to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, began on 9 September. There the squadron flew close-air-support sorties in conjunction with the 3d Marine Division, conducted a missile-firing exercise, and participated in a joint exercise with units of the Fifth Air Force. In addition, there was intensive air-combat training against the AV-8s of VMF-513.

Leaving Kadena on 14 November, VMFA-115 moved to Cubi Point, basking in the glow of commendatory letters for its performance on Okinawa. In the Philippines, the squadron flew close-air-support missions for the 4th Marines, practiced dissimilar sorties against

*As a brand-new second lieutenant, he had first joined VMF(AW)-115 in February 1957, some 18 years earlier.

**VMFA-115 was the last active-duty F-4B squadron.

Navy F-8s, and carried out more training with air-to-air missiles.

The beginning of 1976 (2 January) found the squadron returning once more to its base at Iwakuni. Back in Japan VMFA-115 continued with its normal training activities, and during February it sent a deployment to Kwang-Ju Air Base, Korea, for 12 days of joint operations with Republic of Korea forces. Another move to Cubi Point occurred in March, where the unit took part in a combined U.S. Marine-Philippine Marine exercise. This activity was followed by a return for two months to Kadena Air Base on Okinawa (22 March-19 May), and then a month at Misawa Air Base in northern Japan (19 May-24 June) for practice in air-to-air tactics, inflight refueling, and night air-to-ground ordnance delivery. This series of events brought another message of commendation, this time from the commander of the Seventh Fleet. The message praised the VMFA-115 personnel for their professional military approach to unusual and different training problems, and applauded the squadron's rapid response to a change in the training cycle and location.¹

Lieutenant Colonel Richard H. Glass became VMFA-115's newest commanding officer on 17 June. As Lieutenant Colonel Glass later recalled the day:

I assumed command of the squadron at Misawa Air Base. The ceremony consisted of Lieutenant Colonel Wilson, whom I relieved, and myself flying over the field in forma-

tion, then landing and taxiing to our flight line to conduct the remaining formal activities with all hands and guests in attendance. That was the last "fly-over" change of command of that era.²

The second half of 1976 saw a continuation of deployments and training, with the squadron operating in Korea (1-5 July), Japan (5-28 July), and the Philippines (28 July-19 September), before returning to Iwakuni for the remainder of the year. Lieutenant Colonel Glass remembered this busy period:

Our departure from Misawa took us to Kwang-Ju Air Base, Korea, where we were hosted by the ROKAF Fighter Squadron 115. They flew F-5s and treated us in a most hospitable manner. Our operations in Korea were in support of the 3d Marine Division. We next deployed to our "home base," Iwakuni. After consolidating our supply support we deployed to Cubi Point, where we conducted weapons delivery training.

One additional major event occurred during the last three weeks of October, when six of the squadron's planes and 121 of its men took part in a combined operation with Australian and New Zealander air units at the Royal Australian Air Force Base, Amberley, Australia. Lieutenant Colonel Glass commented:

We shared the KC-130 assets with 6 A-4Ms of VMA-311 and 6 A-V8s of VMA-513 The squadron's mission was to participate in "Kangaroo Two," a combined operation The mission, as I see it today, was to "show the flag." The energies and assets expended were considerable, and

A VMFA-115 F-4J successfully launches a Sparrow missile during a training mission.

Photo courtesy of LtCol Richard H. Glass



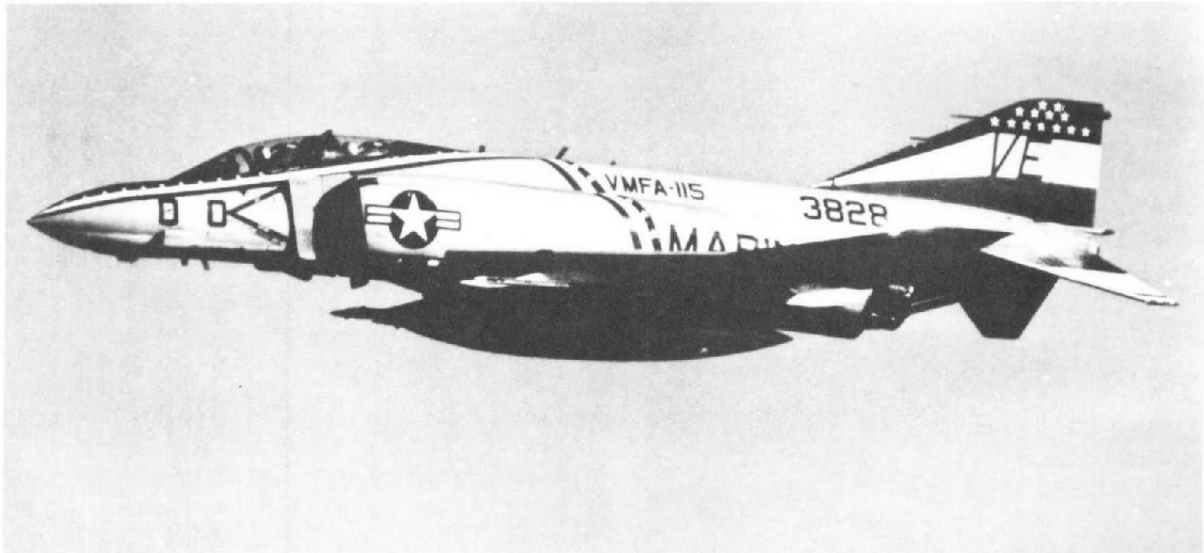


Photo courtesy of Maj Nicholas P. Mammarella

An F-4J is painted with the stars and stripes to commemorate the nation's Bicentennial.

I am confident that the Australian people who met and welcomed us carry positive memories of our Marines.

For some reason traveling longitudinally across the earth doesn't generate the same respect for distance that traveling laterally across the earth does. We flew, and were supported by our own Marines, on a 12,000-nautical-mile round trip from Iwakuni. We aerial refueled over Okinawa and landed at Cubi Point, then aerial refueled over Zamboanga, and landed at Darwin, Australia.

Lieutenant Colonel Glass continued his account:

The people of Darwin were very friendly, climbing over the canopy rail before I could deplane, and invited us into their homes. We next aerial refueled over the subcontinent's northern coast, then flew south to RAAF Amberley. There is no doubt that the highlight of the entire operation was the transit to and from Australia.

The flight operations from Amberley were three hour missions up over the Great Barrier Reef, during which time I had occasion to intercept only one section of Mirages, the RAAF fighter aircraft of that day.

The favorable public impact of this long-distance deployment stood in sharp contrast to the critical operational evaluation in the squadron's command chronology. The latter pointed out that effective utilization of the squadron's F-4J assets was considered virtually nonexistent, because realistic fighter-attack training was not accomplished at the most elementary level. This was due to a variety of factors: lack of knowledge of proper tactical employment of the F-4Js, incorrect assignment of vectors, no use of Marine Corps GCI controllers, failure to assign aircraft to FAC control, and unsatisfactory radio communications.*³

*Lieutenant Colonel Glass commented: "Those observations are rather narrow in light of a ten year perspective."

The quality of VMFA-115's work was once more recognized when it was again nominated by the 1st MAW Awards Board for the Hanson Award as Marine Fighter Squadron of the Year for 1975-76.** In addition, there were messages of commendation from the commanders of Carrier Task Force 77 and Carrier Task Force 75.

The squadron's 1976 pattern of "base hopping" re-occurred in 1977. The first six months found VMFA-115 alternating between Iwakuni (1-8 January and 8 April-30 June) and Kadena (8 January-8 April), with smaller detachments spending time at Cubi Point and Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. There were also ground attack and close-air-support missions near Seoul, Korea, 18-27 April.

Lieutenant Colonel Glass recalled some details:

In 1977 our three month deployment to Kadena Air Base was really noteworthy to me in only two respects. The first was that we were able to conduct a missile shoot [when] missiles were in short supply The second noteworthy event was the realization I shared with my squadron that, after spending an extended period with the U.S. Air Force, we all felt very fortunate to be a part of Naval Aviation.

Our next Cubi Point deployment was in support of 7th Fleet operations and rather uneventful; however, our deployment to Clark Air Base was to participate in a Cope Thunder exercise which involved most of the U.S. Air Force's tactical assets in that theatre of operations. The training was unique, as were the insights gained of Air Force operations.

In a final observation, Lieutenant Colonel Glass noted:

**VMFA-115 did not receive the award this time, but took consolation in the fact it was still considered the "best" fighter-attack squadron in the 1st MAW.

Our final period at Iwakuni prior to the squadron returning to CONUS again consisted of only two operationally noteworthy events. The first consisted of our close air support sorties in support of the U.S. Army near the Korean DMZ. These flights were all supported with VMGR-152's KC-130 tankers. The second event was a 1st MAW Operational Readiness Inspection. I remember that Colonel Michael P. Sullivan, of the wing G-3, and Brigadier General Keith A. Smith, the AWC [Air Wing Commander] were favorably impressed at the debrief.

Major Patrick J. Jones took over as interim commanding officer on 3 June, serving until 30 August, when he was succeeded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert S. Morris, Jr.

July began with preparations for deployment to MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina. After more than 12 years in the Far East, the squadron was to be relieved by VMFA-251. All aircraft were thoroughly checked out, and reconfigured to ferry profiles. Pilots prepared for the transit by carrying out refueling exercises.

On 22 July the main body of enlisted personnel left Iwakuni in Air Force C-141s. Then, during the period 30-31 July, nine of the squadron's F-4Js flew to Wake Island. By 11 August the full squadron was at Beaufort, assigned to MAG-31. The arrival of the Silver Eagles at Beaufort marked a big change in squadron routine from duty in the Far East. Beaufort had been chosen as a single site for Marine Corps east coast F-4 opera-

tions, and VMFA-115 joined five other F-4 squadrons already stationed there. Working into the 2d MAW scheme of operations at "Fighter Town East," as Beaufort was called, was a real challenge for the squadron.

Barely settled in at its new base, VMFA-115 had to "repack" for a deployment to MCAS Yuma, Arizona.⁴ Arriving at Yuma on 7 October, the Silver Eagles went through a series of air-to-air and air-to-ground training exercises. Additionally, the squadron spent two days at the Naval Weapons Center Electronic Warfare Range at China Lake, California. On 27 October, VMFA-115 returned to Beaufort.

The following two months were focused on day and night fighter interceptor sorties and training in DACT (Dissimilar Air Combat Tactics) against USAF F-15s.

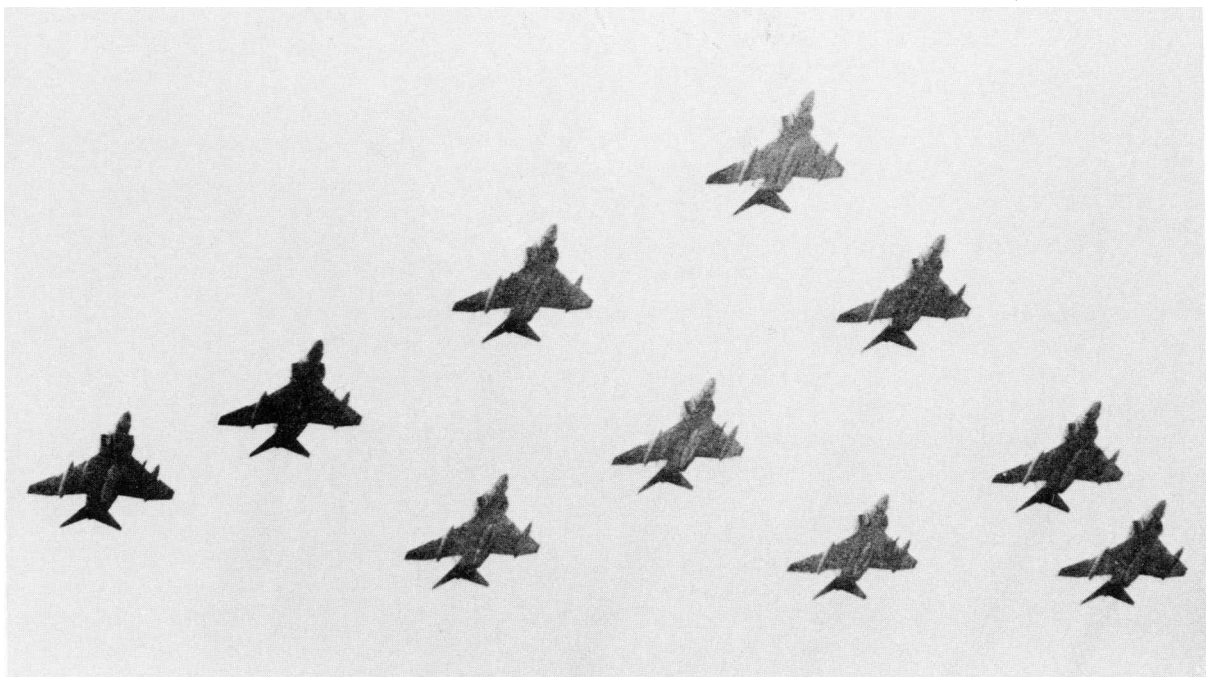
One happy statistic was noted as 1977 ended: VMFA-115 had run up a total of 10,162.9 accident-free hours through the years since October 1974.⁵

The first half of 1978 saw a continuation of DACT training against a variety of planes: F-15s, A-4Fs, A-4Ms, AV-8As, F-5Fs, F-5Es, and F-100s. This training took elements of the squadron to Florida, California, and Virginia, and opponents included Air Force, Navy, and Air National Guard units.

The continuing evolution of aircraft was symbolized by the receipt, on 7 February, of the squadron's first

A flight of 10 VMFA-115 Silver Eagle F-4Js appears in wedge formation in 1977.

VMFA-115 Cruise Book Photo



plane equipped with the improved Westinghouse 1590 AWG-10A fire-control radar. The continuously displayed impact mode of its computer was a great improvement over manual modes, for it provided a method for accurate target attack, regardless of dive angle.

Two exercises were planned and coordinated by VMFA-115 during this period: a missile-firing exercise for MAG-31 at NAS Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, in March, and AvElEx 2-78, an aviation electronic warfare exercise in June. This latter operation was the first major aviation exercise to be held at Beaufort, one which involved the whole of the 2d MAW, as well as sister service units from all parts of the United States.⁶

The last half of 1978 saw VMFA-115 continue a program of ECM (Electronic Counter-Measures) and DACT training; gunnery range practice at Yuma and China Lake; and a variety of joint exercises such as ComputEx 4-78, AvElEx 3-78, and Red Flag 78-9.

On 15 December, Lieutenant Colonel Larry B. Hannah took command of VMFA-115 from Lieutenant Colonel Morris.⁷

The pattern of activities undertaken in 1978 carried over into 1979. There were four major exercises in the first six months. One innovation for VMFA-115 at the time was the introduction of SCAR (Strike Control and Reconnaissance) missions.⁸ Sorties were flown in conjunction with RF-4Cs to provide close-air-support training in a simulated high-threat, fluid, tactical-air environment.

During the first half of 1979 the squadron marked three milestones in flight safety: 15,000 accident-free hours and receipt of both the 1978 FMFLant and CNO Annual Aviation Safety Awards.⁹

The final six months of 1979 were highlighted by a deployment during the period 30 August-16 September to USNS Keflavik, Iceland. Staging through Goose Bay, Labrador, the squadron used six F-4Js in the operation. Flying all-weather missions in a cold-weather environment in support of Commander, Iceland Defense Force, squadron aircrews made intercepts of Soviet Bear aircraft on 7, 12, and 14 September.*

Upon its return to Beaufort the squadron began field carrier-landing practice, and on the 14th and 15th of November actual carrier qualifications were made on the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN 69).

Lieutenant Colonel Jack B. Hammond took over as

*"Bear" was the NATO code name for the Russian Tupolev TU-95 long-range strategic attack bomber. It was also extensively used for maritime reconnaissance. Powered by four turbo-propeller engines, it was a swept-back mid-wing monoplane using X-band radar for target location. (*Janes' Aircraft*, 1978-79, pp. 198-99)

commanding officer of the Silver Eagles on 15 December, and led the squadron into its 1980 training cycle. DACT missions in January were followed by deployment to Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, where, from 26 January to 9 February, VMFA-115 participated in Red Flag 80-2. Next the squadron went to MCAS Yuma, and from 28 March to 18 April expended its entire year's allowance of live ordnance within that three-week span.

Upon returning to its home base, VMFA-115 began preparations for deployment on an aircraft carrier. Training in May was concentrated on intercept work and air-to-air weapons delivery. This was augmented by a deployment during most of the June timeframe to NAS Oceana, Virginia, as the first Marine fighter participant in the Navy Fleet Fighter ACM Readiness Program. At Oceana the Silver Eagles became the first east coast Marine squadron to use the AIM-9L Sidewinder missile on the Air Combat Maneuvering Range.¹⁰

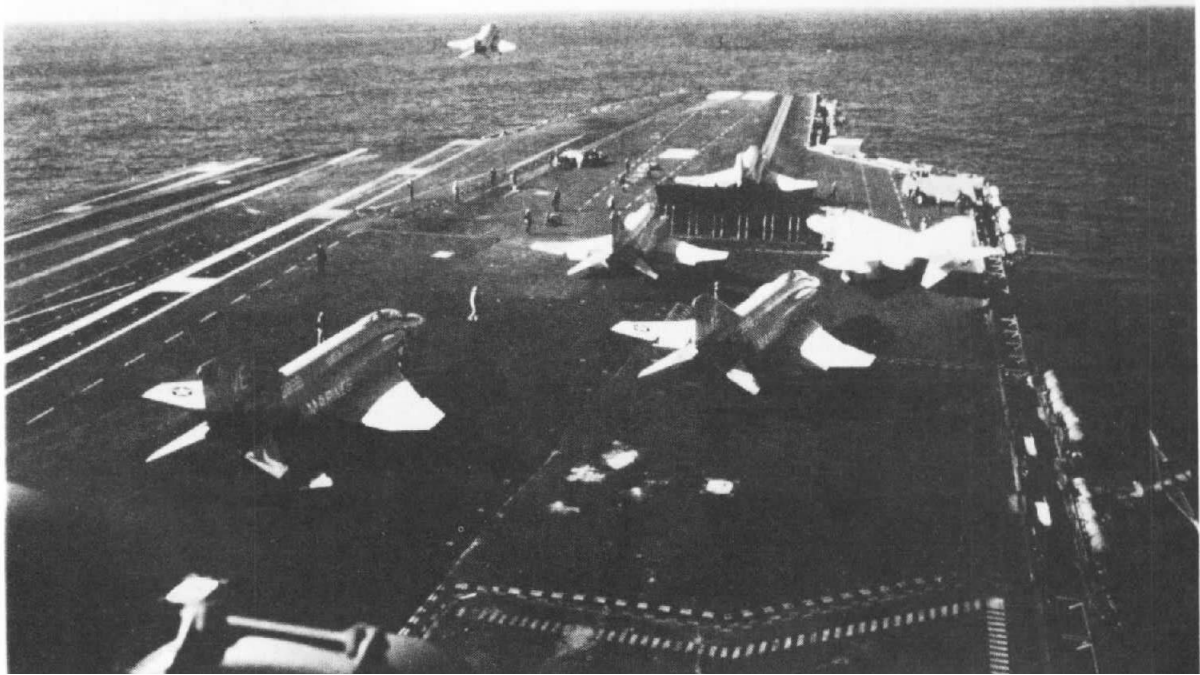
VMFA-115 was again nominated for the Hanson Award, this time by 2d MAW for 1979-80. Although the squadron did not get the award, its executive officer, Major "T" D. Seder, received the Marine Corps Aviation Association's Cunningham Award as Marine Aviator of the Year.

In August the squadron was back at Oceana for touch-and-go and arrested-landing practice on the carrier USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68). Ten F-4Js and 26 officers had been sent to train for the upcoming cruise with the Sixth Fleet, an operational plum which was eagerly sought after by all Marine fighter squadrons.

On 25 October the Silver Eagles came on board the carrier USS *Forrestal* (CV 59) with 30 officers and 9 F-4Js.

The course of operations took the ship to NAS Roosevelt Roads and NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. During the cruise VMFA-115 amassed 521.8 flight hours, made 328 sorties, and achieved 246 day- and 112-night arrested landings. All its aircrews became day and night qualified in the use of both A-6 and A-7 aircraft for aerial refueling, and, if carrier duty wasn't exciting enough in its own right, an extra spark was added when squadron aircrews intercepted two Soviet TU-95 Bears on 5 December. As a result of this deployment, which ended on 16 December, Lieutenant Colonel Hammond was able to report that the squadron's "operating savvy and experience had taken a quantum jump."¹¹

One sad note on the cruise was an accident at Guantanamo Bay which broke the Silver Eagles' impressive six-year safety record (beginning in October 1974) of



VMFA-115 Cruise Book Photo

VMFA-115 F-4Js conduct carrier qualifications on the USS Eisenhower in November 1979.

20,488 accident-free hours. Captain Travis D. Holland's F-4J suffered a utility hydraulic failure, and the plane crashed. However, he and his RIO, First Lieutenant Eugene E. Shoultz, Jr., escaped unhurt.

The year 1981 got off to a fast start. On 8-10 January, 10 of the squadron's F-4Js went back on board the *Forrestal*. The dangers of carrier operations were vividly shown in the following days. On 12 January Captain Holland was lost at sea after his plane suffered a ramp strike on a night recovery.*

An Operational Readiness Evaluation (ORE) in the Jacksonville, Florida, operating area during the period 19-21 January did not go well. In the words of Lieutenant Colonel Hammond:

The ORE proved to be more of an exercise in gamesmanship than an evaluation of the squadron's readiness to go to war. This was probably the result of two separate factors; first of all, the exercise was condensed from the normal 4 ½ days to 2 ½ days. Secondly, the ranges in the Jax Op Area are inadequate to handle air wing size alpha strikes on meaningful targets. The ORE was supposed to be a molding of the Air Wing into a fighting team, yet I felt as though the fierce competition among the squadrons fostered exactly the opposite of a team concept. One concept was preached and an entirely different one practiced.¹²

Returning briefly to Beaufort on 1 March, VMFA-115 took off for the main event for which it had prepared so intensively, a Mediterranean cruise on board the *For-*

*His RIO, Captain Charles F. Toler III, was fortunate to survive the accident.

restal. On 16 March, the squadron made an interception of a Soviet TU-95 Bear plane west of Gibraltar. Passing through the Straits, the aircraft of the *Forrestal* conducted operations in the western Mediterranean.

The realities of international tension were dramatically illustrated to the squadron when it began taking part in a "peacetime aerial reconnaissance protection mission" along the Libyan coastline.** On 25 April, VMFA-115 planes successfully intercepted four sections of Libyan Air Force MiG-23 aircraft. Similar intercepts also occurred on 1 May and 20 June.

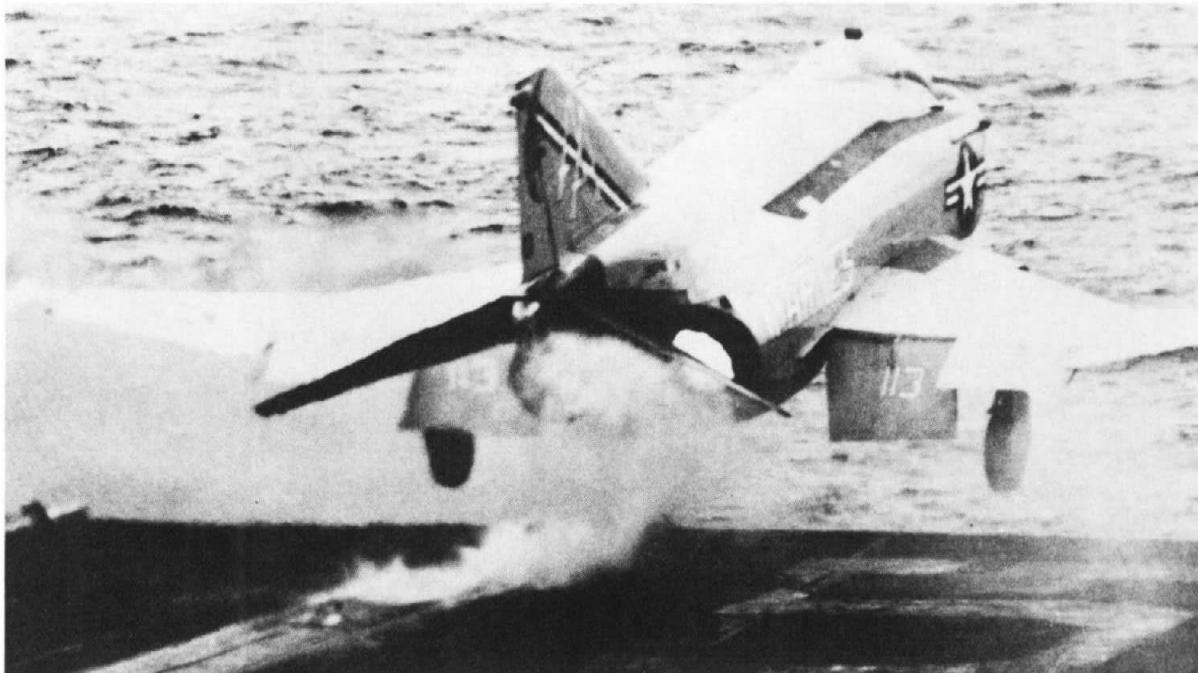
May also found the Silver Eagles busy with DACT practice in Exercise Daily Double against U.S., Italian, and Greek G-91, F-104, and Mirage F-1 planes. This was followed by Exercise Dual Dagger with more DACT—this time against French Navy F-8s and Super Entendards.

Moving to a new hot spot, VMFA-115, as part of the fighter contingent on board the *Forrestal*, stood by in the eastern Mediterranean during May and June, ready to support a Lebanon Evacuation Contingency Plan.

The squadron's continuing high level of performance was reflected by a 2d MAW nomination of it, for the second consecutive year, for the 1980-81 Hanson Trophy.

The Silver Eagles continued operations from the

**These missions escorted the carrier's reconnaissance aircraft while they flew in international airspace near the northern coast of Libya.



VMFA-115 Cruise Book Photo

A VMFA-115 F-4J is airborne after a successful "cat shot" from the USS Forrestal in 1981.

Forrestal throughout the summer, and in mid-August another moment of high tension occurred:

On 18 and 19 August 1981 the squadron was part of a Battle Force which was assigned two missions. First, conduct operations in the international waters of the Gulf of Sidra to emphasize freedom of navigation; and, second, conduct an open ocean missile firing exercise. USS *Forrestal* fighters were tasked to provide barrier combat air patrols (BARCAP) in the event that Libyan aircraft challenged the Battle Force. In the course of the two day operation, squadron aircraft intercepted and turned back 22 sections of Libyan MiG-23 (Flogger) aircraft who approached the Force. In the course of the exercise, USS *Nimitz* F-14 aircraft were fired upon by Libyan SU-22 aircraft. During the ensuing engagement, 2 SU-22 aircraft were shot down without the loss of a naval aircraft.

VMFA-115 fighters were engaged several times after the F-14/SU-22 engagement by Libyan MiG-23s with unknown intentions. Squadron aircrews maintained offensive advantage during their engagement until ordered to disengage. Squadron crews, knowing that hostile acts had occurred, exercised extraordinary restraint during the period of heightened international tensions. Each crew in the squadron had the opportunity to intercept Floggers, testing their skills in a unique operational environment. The squadron amassed over 100 flight hours during the two days of Battle Force Operations.¹³

The shooting down of the Libyan jets caused an international furor. The situation had developed because of Libyan claims to a 200-mile territorial limit from their coast, while the United States recognized just the 12 mile limit established by international law. Only

a quirk of fate precluded VMFA-115's aircraft from being involved in the incident.

Leaving the Mediterranean, VMFA-115 continued training, and participated in Portuguese PassEx and EncounterEx with the USS *Eisenhower* and in Ocean Venture 81, the largest peacetime naval warfare exercise since World War II.

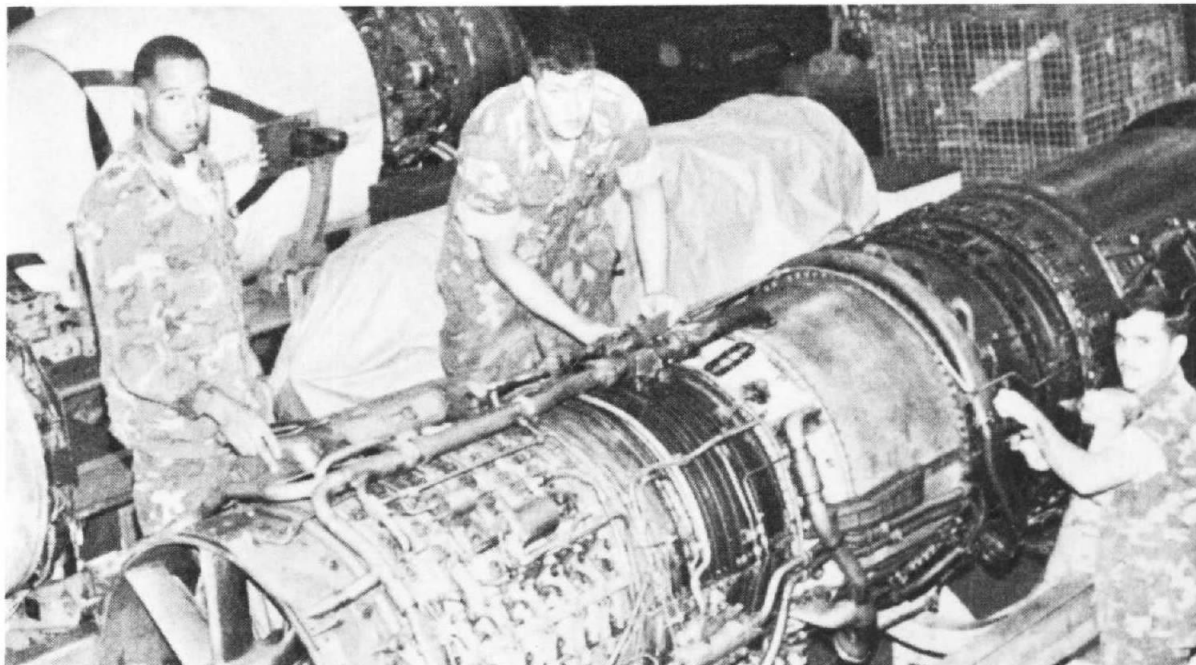
Colonel Hammond described VMFA-115's activities during the Ocean Venture exercise:*

In September, the squadron was involved in a series of exercises that demanded operations in the North Atlantic Ocean, North Sea, and Norwegian Sea. Together with the carrier USS *Eisenhower*, the USS *Forrestal* operated as part of a Battle Force within the range of the Naval Air of Soviet Aviation. The squadron was on constant alert to intercept Soviet aircraft from 29 August to 10 September 1981. On almost a daily basis, F-4's intercepted TU-95 (Bear D) reconnaissance aircraft. When operating near/above the Arctic Circle within range of the Soviet TU-16 (Badger) aircraft, squadron F-4's intercepted, escorted, and observed numerous divisions of Badgers which conducted mass simulated raids against the Battle Force.**

At the completion of this last major exercise, flight operations on board ship drew to a close. On 13 September, after an Atlantic crossing, VMFA-115 flew off its planes, returning to Beaufort two days later. It had been an exciting tour of duty!

*Colonel Hammond was promoted from Lieutenant Colonel on 1 August 1981.

**For these operations above the Arctic Circle, the squadron earned the coveted "Blue Nose Award."



VMFA-115 Cruise Book Photo

Maintenance goes on behind the scenes to keep the planes of VMFA-115 ready to fly.

Colonel Hammond later submitted a voluminous and detailed report. In it he bluntly listed some crucial problems that the squadron had encountered:

It would appear that we have deployed a sufficient number of F-4 squadrons aboard carriers in the last 15 years to have the procedure down pat by now, but I assure you this is not the case The most serious mistake that was made was one that caused the squadron two major accidents and the life of one of our pilots. First, and most important, is that a squadron must be fully day and night carrier qualified prior to the commencement of Type Training. Once Type Training commences, the Air Wing by necessity gets into Cyclic Ops. Once this starts, there is no time to go slow and allow the Marines to carrier qual. This then requires that you fly those who are qualified and not fly those who are not.

Instead of a short intensive period of day and night Quals, where the pilot can learn from his mistakes, he only gets one landing at a time. The learning process is slowed considerably, and he tends to make the same mistakes over and over again. The Carrier Qual Phase that this squadron went through was totally unsat in every aspect. Not one pilot was qualified prior to commencing Cyclic Ops. The last pilot was not night qualified until late in December, after starting in October

Colonel Hammond then went on to analyze critically the problem of pilot selection:

It is my firm belief that Senior Marine Officers, who are required to plan and execute these deployments, do not really understand the degree of difficulty of night Carrier Ops in the F-4. As Marine Aviators we have all Carrier Qualified at some time, but we are not by any definition knowledgeable of Carrier Ops. The valuable Marine tradition of "Strong Leadership" and "Can Do" spirit have very limited use when

flying the Ball on a dark night. I can only speak for one senior LtCol when I say that night Carrier Ops are by far the most difficult flying—mentally and physically—that I have ever done. It does not get easier with experience, rather it maintains its incredible level of difficulty.

The Phantom is not an A-4, A-6, or F4U. The max trap weight of 5.8 gives you two looks at the deck before bingo or tanking.* Divert fields in the Med are nearly non-existent today, so you have to be able to get aboard. In order to put together a competent carrier capable squadron, you must start the Qual evolution with more pilots than you require for deployment, by at least 3. Day Quals are by themselves a waste of time. Any pilot, given an adequate number of FCLP periods, can safely get aboard in the day. This is not the case at night. The ability to succeed at night is not in any way related to a pilot's basic flying skills. In this squadron the best and most experienced pilots often had the most problems at night. These people must be identified early, before it is too late in the evolution to replace them.

Colonel Hammond's report concluded with some comments on the sensitive relationship between a squadron commander and a carrier captain:

There is an old adage about carrier aviation that says you can only survive if you approach it with the attitude that everyone is trying to kill you. The Commanding Officer must be prepared to spend every moment he is not flying in CAI/CC or Primary. The Captain of a carrier enjoys a unique position in that he, and he alone, directs the operations of the aircraft on the ship. Only he can direct an aircraft to divert or to try one more approach. The C.O. must be pre-

*The "weight of 5.8" refers to 5,800 pounds of fuel remaining, and "bingo" is the term used to divert to another landing location (On a carrier this is only a land base—if available).



VMFA-115 Cruise Book Photo

Each Silver Eagle aircrewman qualified for Centurion status by attaining at least 100 arrested landings. This milestone was accomplished with two months still remaining in the cruise. The final average was 138 traps.

pared to advise, request, plead, insist, and in general stand absolutely firm in decisions which affect the safety of his aircraft and crews. This is often a difficult and bitter task.¹⁴

Back at Beaufort, once again under the operational control of MAG-31, the Silver Eagles returned to a more normal training pattern. A new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel James A. Davis, took over on 17 October, and the squadron filled the remaining months of 1981 with a variety of exercises: MAG-31's AAWEx 7-81, 2d MAW's AvEiEx 1-28, USAF's Sentry GB XII, and Joint Services' Seabat 1-82.

It had been a busy year. The squadron had amassed a total of 3,385.1 flight hours and 1,839 sorties, with 1,375 carrier arrested landings.

The advent of 1982 brought more challenges. On 18-19 January VMFA-115 participated in a MAG-31 missile exercise. After tanking twice from VMGR-252's C-130s enroute to the Roosevelt Roads missile range, the squadron fired AIM-7E-3 Sparrow and AIM-9G/H Sidewinder missiles. The squadron next deployed to Cherry Point from 16 to 19 March for AvEiEx 2-82, operating in an expeditionary field environment. Finally, it carried out an air-to-ground block training period, deploying to Patrick AFB, Florida, from 10-17 April. During this deployment the squadron was controlled by Air Force airborne FACs on close air support missions. The period 12-14 May found the Silver Eagles again simulating an expeditionary environment during AAWEx 2-82 at Beaufort. Additionally, an experimental, all-purpose, canvas-and-steel maintenance hangar was used successfully for the first time. A little over a week later, VMFA-115 was back at Cherry Point with five aircraft and 40 squadron personnel participating in a "Fighter Derby." Using the Tactical Air Combat Training System, dissimilar air combat was

flown against F-15, AV-8, A-6 and TA-4 adversaries. Seabat, a joint-service electronic counter-measures exercise, concluded operations for the first half of the year.

Amid all the training, there was a gratifying moment of recognition. On 21 April, the Commanding General, 2d MAW, presented VMFA-115 with a Meritorious Unit Commendation from the Secretary of the Navy for the squadron's superb work on the *Forrestal*.*

The squadron continued to work hard in the second half of 1982, with its first F-4S arriving on 2 August. This new model incorporated important improvements, such as structural strengthening, leading-edge maneuvering slats, air-to-air IFF, a modified J79-GE-10B engine, and an improved AN/AWG-10A weapon control system.¹⁵ The latter part of the year saw the completion of the squadron's air-to-air block training, with a deployment to Oceana from 26 November to 17 December, and participation in the Fleet Fighter ACM Readiness Program. During the Fighter exercises VMFA-115 flew 136 sorties of DACT against F-5s and A-4s.

The highlight of the period, however, was VMFA-115's receipt of its third Hanson Trophy (for 1981-2) on 2 October. Only one other squadron, VMFA-323, had been so honored.

By January 1983 the changeover to a 12-plane F-4S squadron was complete, and the Silver Eagles launched into a series of programs to polish their aircrew skills. On 29 January the squadron deployed to MCAS Yuma for air-to-ground training and completion of a Marine Corps Readiness Evaluation.

Returning to Beaufort on 19 February, VMFA-115 began to get ready for its next assignment: carrier qualifications. A change in command took place at this stage, as Lieutenant Colonel John C. Church took over from Lieutenant Colonel Davis on 19 April.**

The next month, during the period 5-14 May, the entire squadron moved to Oceana for touch-and-go and arrested-landing qualification aboard the carrier USS *John F. Kennedy* (CVA-67). The training went smoothly: VMFA-115 met all its overhead times on schedule and with the required number of aircraft, a feat not accomplished by any of the other participating units.¹⁶

Three weeks later, VMFA-115 was off again, this time to Patrick AFB, Florida, for close-air-support training with Air Force airborne forward air controllers. All

*See Appendix D for the full citation.

**Lieutenant Colonel Church was the first NFO (Naval Flight Officer) to command VMFA-115.

went well, and Lieutenant Colonel Church, in evaluating the deployment, noted the intangible benefits gained by all concerned when different services have a chance to work together in a tactical scenario.¹⁷

During the last half of 1983 the squadron deployed six planes to Cherry Point for DACT against F-14s, A-4s, and F-15s (14-19 August and 2-7 October), and it also sent three planes to Yuma for a weapons tactics instructors course. Sadly, on 4 November, VMFA-115 experienced two fatalities when Major David G. Buell, the squadron's executive officer, and Captain Donald W. Spearel, an Air Force exchange officer, were killed when their plane crashed into the sea while orbiting in bad weather. They were participating in a flyover as part of a memorial service at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for the Marines who had been killed in the Beirut bombing.

The last major exercise of the year for the squadron occurred during the period 21 November-12 December when VMFA-115 flew its entire complement of 11 aircraft to NAS Fallon, Nevada, for an air-to-ground weapons deployment. At Fallon it participated in operations with aircraft and crews from VMO-2 and HMA-169, simulating close-air-support operations in a rescue combat-air-patrol situation. This mission exposed 80 percent of the squadron's aircrews to combined arms operations in support of a ground element. Additionally, conventional low-altitude bombing flights and loft bombing flights were flown by first-tour aircrews. The deployment provided live air-to-ground ordnance practice, as well as exposure to

"threat" electronic equipment. H&MS-31 TA-4s, and OV-10s from VMO-2 provided airborne control during simulated close-air-support missions.

During the Fallon deployment, the squadron's intelligence section was deeply involved in the mission briefings and debriefings. Using a continuing, mission-oriented intelligence program, the intelligence section was able to achieve its primary objective of acquainting the squadron's aircrews with a realistic, steadily developing "combat" scenario.

Support provided by VMGR-252 during the 12 December retrograde from NAS Fallon to MCAS Beaufort also provided aircrew familiarization and requalification in aerial refueling.

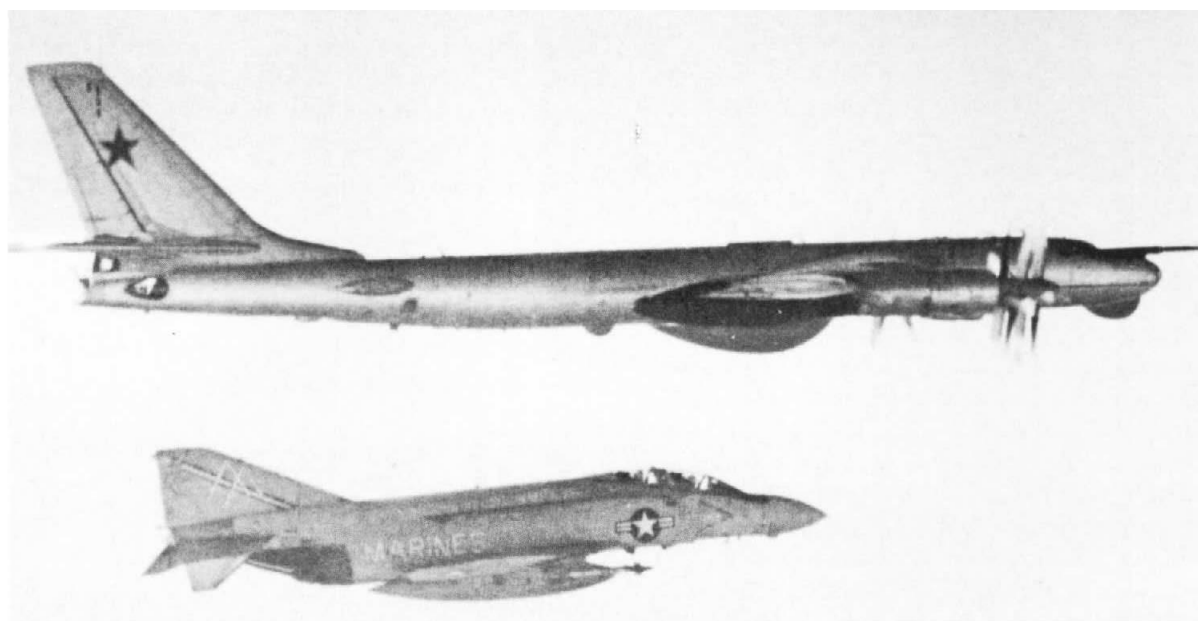
The tempo of training continued at a fast pace for VMFA-115 as it moved into 1984. There were exercises and deployments to Roosevelt Roads for missile firings (17-21 January); Nellis AFB, Nevada, for Red Flag 84-2 (4-18 February); NAS Lemoore, California, for ACM (17-24 March); Cherry Point for DACT (1-7 April); Patrick AFB for close air support (28 April-11 May); and an antiaircraft warfare exercise at Beaufort.

At the end of this hectic period, on 27 June, Lieutenant Colonel James D. Wojtasek took over as the new commanding officer of the Silver Eagles.

The latter half of 1984 was spent in preparation for a change-over to a dramatic new aircraft, the F/A-18 Hornet. This meant a transition from a combat-ready F-4S squadron to a squadron with no aircraft, as VMFA-115 transferred its F-4S planes to VMFA-122 and VMFA-251. Yet, while the squadron still had a few air-

A Silver Eagle F-4J "escorts" a Soviet TU-95 Bear as it approaches the carrier task force.

VMFA-115 Cruise Book Photo



craft, there were mini-deployments for DACT to Tyn-dall AFB, Florida; a hurricane evacuation to NAS Dallas, Texas; DACT training at Eglin AFB, Florida; and low-altitude tactics training at Yuma. Finally, on 14 December, after 21 years, VMFA-115 flew its last F-4 Phantom II.

With the arrival of 1985 and no aircraft assigned, the squadron prepared for the eventual receipt of its F/A-18s. Pilots and maintenance personnel were sent to NAS Lemoore, California, for six months of training with the Navy's VFA-125, the first F/A-18 squadron.

The F/A-18 was a major technological advancement over the F-4 in terms of capability in the fighter attack mission. It could carry 17,000 pounds of ordnance, including conventional or laser-guided bombs, rockets (Walleye, Harm, and Maverick), and AIM-9L/M Sidewinder missiles, and it had an internal 20mm cannon. Able to attain a Mach 1.8 speed, it was effective at altitudes over 50,000 feet.¹⁸ Further, in the words of Major General Richard M. Cooke, Commanding General, 2d MAW:

The guy who can turn best wins, and the F/A-18 turns best. It has great maneuver capabilities with very impressive navigation and ordnance delivery systems . . . Pilots just becoming acquainted with the system consistently deliver their ordnance within six feet of a given target. Now, before the advent of the F/A-18, we have had aircraft that were capable of flying in either the attack or fighter mode, but making the transition was never that simple. In the F/A-18 all you have to do, literally, is flip a switch to convert from one role to another.¹⁹

As Marine pilots had hoped, the Hornet proved easier to fly and maintain than the F-4. Maintenance crews were enthusiastic: "It accepts repair parts easier . . . The aircraft troubleshoots itself . . . it will tell you what's wrong with it."²⁰

A transition as dramatic as this required long and extensive preparation. Major Douglas D. Tyler had arrived at Beaufort in the fall of 1982 to head up a "Hornet Introduction Team." It quickly became apparent that the hangars and the supply and maintenance facilities at Beaufort needed to be modernized. This led the group commander to set up a courier run to the contractor facilities on the west coast. Meanwhile, VMFA-115 was put in an old hangar while the structure was in the process of being converted.²¹ Major Tyler also had to coordinate with the personnel monitors at Headquarters Marine Corps, in order to get the right ranks and grades trained at the proper time for starting up the reequipped squadron.²²

Oplan 1-84, published in March 1984, covered all details of the transition, which was planned to last from July 1984 until September 1986. Finally, the



MCAS Beaufort Photo

The first two F/A-18 Hornets were flown in for VMFA-115 by LtCol James D. Wojtasek, commanding officer of the squadron, left, and Col Robert L. Pappas, commanding officer of MAG-31, right. They were welcomed by MajGen Richard M. Cooke, Commanding General, 2d MAW, center, on 3 July 1985.

preparation came to fruition. The first two F/A-18s reached VMFA-115 on 1 July, and additional shipments trickled in until the squadron had received its full complement of 14 by 9 September, the first east coast Marine squadron to be so equipped.* A ceremony was held on 16 August to mark the official inauguration of the Hornet into the 2d MAW. Among those present were Lieutenant General Alfred M. Grey, Jr., Commanding General, FMFLant, and Major General Richard M. Cooke, Commanding General, 2d MAW.

Meanwhile the squadron, using six planes it had on hand, had already taken part in AAWEx 5-85 at Beaufort and some air combat training at Cherry Point. This deployment was a valuable experience, since it was conducted away from base.

September was spent in further air combat training in preparation for a full-scale deployment to Tyn-dall AFB, Panama City, Florida, which took place between 7 October and 18 October. A total of 12 Hornets, 18 officers, and 118 enlisted men moved there from Beaufort for DACT operations against F-15 and F-16 aircraft. It was an intensive program: 224 sorties and a total of 270 hours were flown in the equivalent of nine full working days. Commenting on the help-

*Other squadrons' records show 3 July as the initial delivery date.



MCAS Beaufort Photo

An inauguration ceremony for the new F/A-18 Hornets was held at MCAS Beaufort on 16 August 1985 featuring the Silver Eagles' complement of six of the new aircraft.

fulness of his Air Force hosts, Lieutenant Colonel Wojtasek stated, "I flew more four-versus-four sorties on this deployment than I have flown in my previous 17 years of fighter-attack experience. Both the F-15 and F-16 pilots were more than willing to debrief and explain new tactics peculiar to single seat fighters."²³

The remainder of 1985 saw continuing air-to-air and air-to-ground training, including a "Landing Zone Bluebird" demonstration of Marine firepower for the Honorable John H. Lehman, Jr., Secretary of the Navy.* The year concluded with the squadron having successfully completed 1,416 flight hours during the final three months. The VMFA-115 command chronology noted, "The tempo of operations has been the highest recorded in recent times, and this with a brand new aircraft."²⁴

As the year 1986 began, this heavy training schedule paid off: on 28 January the squadron was declared fully combat ready (C1 status). Personnel strength at this time stood at 30 officers and 319 enlisted men, with 14 Hornet aircraft. The level of excellence in the Silver Eagles was confirmed by an Inspector General team from Headquarters Marine Corps, during a visit 18-20 February, when VMFA-115 received the only grade of "Outstanding" in MAG-31.

During the period 28 April to 1 May the squadron took part in a Ninth Air Force exercise (Quick Thrust), training in both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions. This was immediately followed by an 11-aircraft deployment for 27 officers on 4 May to MCAS Yuma, Arizona. For two weeks there, VMFA-115 focused on

*This demonstration consisted of air-to-ground simulated ordnance deliveries under a simulated high-threat environment in support of Camp Lejeune ground units.

low-altitude tactics, close air support, and deep air support during 268 sorties.

The next step for the squadron was to concentrate on air-to-air skills. Accordingly, eight aircraft and 14 pilots spent the period 11-23 June at NAS Oceana, Virginia. There they flew with Navy F-14s and Air Force F-15s on Fleet Air Defense missions.

A change of command took place soon after the Silver Eagles' return to Beaufort; Lieutenant Colonel Horace L. Logan III relieved Lieutenant Colonel Wojtasek on 1 July.**

July and August saw the squadron busy with an air-to-air missile exercise, night flying, and air refueling practice.

As fall approached, VMFA-115 began gearing up for the high point of the year: a NATO deployment.²⁵ Planning and liaison with the 10th Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB) was limited to only the three weeks prior to departure, but the squadron was able to take off on schedule. Thus 12 of its Hornets (and two loaned from VMFA-251) left MCAS Beaufort on 2 September, refueled over the Atlantic from USAF KC-10 tankers, and landed in two cells: one at RAF Turnhouse, Edinburgh, Scotland, and one at Vandel AB, Denmark. When reunited two days later in Denmark, the squadron participated for three weeks in Exercise Northern Wedding/Bold Guard 86 with the 10th MAB. Missions included both air-to-air and air-to-ground sorties.

While there were some problems (such as communications with FACs), this period "provided an unparalleled opportunity to exercise the capabilities of

**Lieutenant Colonel Logan had previously served with the squadron as a first lieutenant in Vietnam in 1970.



Photo courtesy of LtCol Horace L. Logan III

A Silver Eagle F/A-18 Hornet prepares for aerial refueling from a USAF KC-10 tanker during the squadron's trans-Atlantic deployment to Denmark in September of 1986.

the F/A-18 aircraft as an Air Combat Element component of a Marine Amphibious Brigade engaged in large scale joint/combined operations." The Hornet "performed flawlessly" and demonstrated its "exceptional turning performance, low corner velocity, and the remarkable efficiency of its radar." These characteristics resulted in a low fuel consumption which enabled "three hour plus missions."

The Silver Eagles left Denmark on 26 September for NAS Sigonella, Italy, to take part in Exercise Display Determination 86. Leaving there on 6 October, the squadron flew to Ahkisar AB, Turkey. There they engaged in DACT with a Turkish fighter squadron. Rating the opposing pilots "very competent and aggressive," VMFA-115's report recommended: "Keep these guys on our side."

On 14 October the squadron left Turkey, stopped at Sigonella, and then, on 20 October, made the return flight across the Atlantic from NAS Rota, Spain.

It had been a demanding deployment. On the home front, MAG-31 and its other squadrons had

given the Silver Eagles maximum logistical support. The ground crews had worked long shifts, devoting 12-15 man hours per flight hour. VMFA-115's Logistics Department had planned and executed the embarkation of more than 300 Marines and 330,000 pounds of equipment. This necessitated 45 air-cargo movements to eight airfields in five countries, and was achieved "with zero user delay."²⁶

This was an impressive performance by all hands. The Silver Eagles "had done what no other Marine Corps squadron had ever done, taking part in three major NATO exercises, two on the Northern flank and one on the Southern flank." They had flown "1,182.1 hours in six and a half weeks, working from a 'suitcase' . . . crossed the Atlantic twice non-stop and operated from five bases in four countries, primarily in an austere, expeditionary environment."

The remainder of 1986 was much more routine. Participation with the Ninth Air Force in Exercise Quick Thrust in October, air-to-air training in November, and deployments of some aircraft to Tyndall AFB, Florida, and Langley AFB, Virginia, in December con-

cluded “the busiest period in recent Silver Eagle history.”²⁷

The end of 1986 marked more than four decades of outstanding achievement by VMFA-115. The squadron saw extensive service in all the wars in which Marines were involved during those years; it carried out its assigned missions with distinction in the South Pacific, in the Philippines, in North China, in Korea, on Taiwan, in Vietnam, and in Thailand. In peace-

time training, whether in Japan, the United States, Hawaii, Okinawa, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, or Western Europe, it set a standard for the other fighter-attack squadrons of the Marine Corps. This record of exceptional performance was recognized by numerous citations and awards. Thus today's VMFA-115 Marines may look back on the squadron's proud history of accomplishment, and look forward to a promising future in the annals of Marine aviation.

Notes

Formation and Pacific Action

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from the VMF-115 World War II Diaries, (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Md.), hereafter War Diary and date. Technical data on planes is taken throughout from Gordon Swanborough and Peter M. Bowers, *United States Navy Aircraft Since 1911* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2d ed., 1976).

1. War Diary, Jul43.
2. War Diary, Mar44.
3. Col Charles A. Lindbergh, *Autobiography of Values* (New York, Harcourt, 1978).

Philippine Combat

1. Maj Charles W. Boggs, USMC, *Marine Aviation in the Philippines* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1951), p. 26, hereafter Boggs, *Philippines*.
2. FAdm William F. Halsey, USN, and LCdr J. Bryan III, USN, *Admiral Halsey's Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1947), p. 231.
3. Boggs, *Philippines*, p. 29.
4. Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), p. 275, hereafter Sherrod, *History*.
5. Boggs, *Philippines*, p. 31. This incorrectly lists Lindley as "Captain John...."
6. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
9. War Diary, 23Feb45, RptNo. 129.
10. War Diary, Feb45, Attachment.
11. Sherrod, *History*, p. 316.
12. Boggs, *Philippines*, p. 117. This action was repeated on 28Mar.
13. War Diary, 31May45.

A Move to China

1. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *The United States Marines in North China, 1945-1949* (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1962), p. 1.
2. Col Fred J. Gilhuly, Comments on draft ms, 21Oct86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

3. Col Harry B. Hooper, Comments on draft ms, 11Nov86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

Hawaiian and Stateside Duty

1. Col Gordon H. Knott, Comments on draft ms, 7Oct86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
2. *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1949-50*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd.) p. 228c, hereafter *Jane's Aircraft* and date.
3. Col John B. Maas, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 22Sep86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.). Confirmed by telecon with LtCol Boyd O. Whitney, 16Oct86.
4. VMF-115 Historical Diary, (Washington National Records Center), hereafter HistD and date. HistD, 1Jul49-31Dec49.
5. HistD, 1Jan50-30Jun50.
6. HistD, 1Jul50-31Dec50.

Korean Combat

In this period the official records of VMF-115 were called Command Diaries (Washington National Records Center), hereafter ComdD and date.

1. LtCol Thomas M. Coles, Comments on draft ms, 14Dec86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
2. ComdD, Jun52, App D, Ordnance Dept. Rpt, para 3.
3. See also MAG-33 ComdD, Jun52, App 3, p. 3, and Tab D, p. 21.
3. Maj William J. Sambito, USMC, *A History of Marine Attack Squadron 311* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1978), pp. 23-24, hereafter Sambito, *VMF-311*.
4. Col John M. Verdi, USMCR, "The First Hundred" (unpublished ms, 1953), Chap VI, pp. 1-3.
5. Sambito, *VMF-311*, p. 24.
6. ComdD, Jul52, Ordnance Appendix.
7. LtCol Pat Meid, USMC, and Maj James L. Yingling, USMC, *Operations in West Korea—U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953*, vol V (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1972), pp. 177-178, hereafter Meid et al., *OpsWestKorea*.
8. Sambito, *VMF-311*, p. 26.
9. ComdD, Apr53. Chronological narrative for 17Apr.

10. Meid et al., *OpsWestKorea*, p. 334. The VMF-115 ComdD makes no mention of this.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 341.
12. Peter B. Mersky, *U.S. Marine Corps Aviation, 1912 to the Present* (Annapolis: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1938), pp. 150 and 183, hereafter Mersky, *USMC Aviation*.
13. Meid et al., *OpsWestKorea*, pp. 376 and 578.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 385 and 389.
16. Col Harry B. Hooper, Comments on draft ms, 11Nov86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

Back to the States

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from *The Flight Jacket* (MCAS El Toro, California), hereafter *Flight Jacket*. This is on microfilm at MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. *Flight Jacket*, 27Apr56.
2. Nicholas M. Williams, "VMF(AW)-115," *Journal of the American Aviation Historical Society* (Santa Ana, California), Summer78, p. 132, hereafter Williams, *Journal*.
3. "History of MAG-33," Unit File, RefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC.
4. *Flight Jacket*, 20Jul56.
5. *Ibid.*, 10Aug56.
6. *Ibid.*, 17Aug56.
7. *Ibid.*, 10Sep56.
8. LtGen Leslie E. Brown, Comments on draft ms, 4Nov86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
9. *Flight Jacket*, 9Nov56.
10. *Flight Jacket*, 23Nov56.
11. *Ibid.*, 4Jan57.
12. Col Stoddard G. Cortelyou, Comments on draft ms, 19Sep86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
13. *Flight Jacket*, 12Apr57.
14. Cortelyou, op. cit., Comments.
15. *Flight Jacket*, 15Feb57.
16. *Ibid.*, 7Jun57.
17. Williams, *Journal*, p. 132.
18. *Flight Jacket*, 6Dec57 and 17Jan58.

Japan-U.S. Shuttle

1. *Tori Teller* (MCAS Iwakuni, Japan), 22Mar58, p. 1. The base newspaper gives the arrival date as 11Mar.
2. LtCol Harold A. Langstaff, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 1Dec86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
3. Col Robert D. Heinl, Jr., USMC, *Soldiers of the Sea, The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1962), p. 595.

4. CO, MAG-11, Special Report to CMC, dtd 7Apr59 (MAG-11 File, RefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC), p. 4. This account covers the period 24Aug58 to 11Dec58, the Taiwan assignment for VMF(AW)-115. No squadron ComdD exists for this period.
5. ComdD MAG-11, 1-30Sep58, App D, p. 1. The VMF(AW)-115 section gives the departure date as 6Sep58, App J, p. 1.
6. CO, MAG-11, op. cit., p. 14.
7. Langstaff, op. cit., Comments.
8. Mersky, *USMC Aviation*, p. 196.
9. ComdD, op. cit., App J, p. 3.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
12. ComdD MAG-11, 1Feb to 16Mar59, App E, p. 2.
13. VMF(AW)-115 MRoll (RefSec, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter MRoll with month and year. MRoll, Mar59.
14. Williams, *Journal*, p. 133.
15. *Windsock* (MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina), 25Sep59, p. 1, and 2Oct59, p. 1, hereafter *Windsock*. This base newspaper is the main source of information for the squadron from 4May59 to 18Jun60.
16. *Ibid.*, 6Nov59, p. 8.
17. *Ibid.*, 26Feb60, p. 1, and 11Mar60, p. 1.
18. *Ibid.*, 29Apr60, p. 1. The F4D-1 had an empty weight of 16,024 pounds and a maximum gross weight of 25,000 pounds.
19. MRolls, Apr-Jun60.
20. *Ibid.*, Jun-Jul60.
21. *Windsock*, 11Aug61, p. 4. This gives the date of return to Cherry Point as 1Jul61, p. 1.
22. *Ibid.*, 1Sep61.
23. *Ibid.*, 1Dec61, p. 3.
24. *Ibid.*, 9Mar62, p. 1.
25. *Ibid.*, 31Aug62, p. 8.
26. *Ibid.*, 14Sep62, p. 8.
27. MRolls, Dec62 and Jan63.
28. Col Charles V. V. Smillie, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 7Oct86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
29. *Windsock*, 11Jan63, p. 1.
30. *Ibid.*, 25Jan63, p. 1.
31. Smillie, op. cit., Comments.
32. *Windsock*, 17May63, p. 1.
33. *Ibid.*, 27Mar64, p. 1.
34. Col Don W. Galbreath ltr to Dir, MCHist&Mus, dtd 10Sep86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
35. *Windsock*, 28May64, p. 3.
36. *Ibid.*, 5Feb65, p. 8, and 12Feb65, p. 4.
37. MRolls, May-Jun65.

Vietnam Combat

In this period the terminology for the official records of squadrons changed to Command Chronology (History and Museums Division, HQMC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter ComdC and date.

1. Jack Shulimson and Maj Charles M. Johnson, USMC, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1978), p. 149, hereafter Shulimson et al., *Vietnam*.
2. MAG-11 ComdC, Oct65.
3. III MAF, *Sea Tiger*, 14Jun66, p. 6.
4. Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, *The Marines in Vietnam, 1954-1973* (Washington, 1974), p. 181.
5. "Marines at Work," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Feb67, p. 3.
6. VMFA-115 ComdC, Dec67.
7. BGen Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1968," in U.S. Naval Institute, *Naval Review, 1970* (Annapolis, 1970), p. 299.
8. ComdC, Jan68, p. 2.
9. There were also close escapes, such as that of Capt Douglas P. Light when an enemy incendiary .50-caliber round cut through his flight suit, parachute harness straps, pilot's seat, and canopy during a bombing run. Unharmed, he returned to Chu Lai. (III MAF, *Sea Tiger*, Vol. IV, No. 28, 12Jul68, p. 2).
10. ComdC, Aug68.
11. ComdC, May69.
12. LtCol Donald P. Bowen, Comments on draft ms, 15Sep86, (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
13. ComdC, Feb70, Sec. 2.
14. ComdC, 1-23Aug70, p. 2.
15. ComdC, Dec70, Pt. IV, Sec. 2.

16. ComdC, Feb71, p. 2. As might be expected, there are minor variations plus additional details shown in the totals contained in higher-echelon reports. MAG-11 reported: "VMFA-115, completing its last combat mission on 22 February 1971, stood down the same day, concluding three successful tours in the Republic of Vietnam (11 October 1965-11 January 1966, 11 April 1966-14 February 1967, 16 May 1967-22 February 1971). The squadron compiled 34,480 combat flight hours; 30,083 combat sorties; and dropped 58,345 tons of ordnance. Total bomb damage assessments credited the F4B squadron with more than 668 enemy killed; 1,103 secondary explosions; and 883 secondary fires. VMFA-115 also destroyed 3,062 bunkers; 65 bridges; 167 crew-served weapons; 55 vehicles; 270 fighting positions; and cut 475 roads." See CG, 3d MAB, ltr to SecNav, recommendation for Navy

Unit Commendation for MAG-11, 15Jun71, para 19, in MAG-11 file (RefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).

17. U.S. Marine Corps, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Headquarters Staff Study: "Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Southeast Asia, 1Jul71-31Mar73," Sec 2, pp. 1 and 19.
18. LtCol Kent A. McFerren intvw, 30Jun72, Tape 5053 (Oral Hist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter McFerren intvw.
19. McFerren intvw.

Thailand Deployment

1. 1st MAW, "The Rose Garden Story," May72-Sep73, dtd 6Jan 75, (MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter "Rose Garden."
2. Smillie, op. cit., Comments.
3. McFerren intvw.
4. Col Aubrey W. Talbert Jr. intvw, Aug74, Tape 5071 (Oral Hist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Talbert intvw. Col Talbert was commander of MAG-15 from 10Aug72 to 24Jul73.
5. McFerren intvw.
6. Talbert intvw.
7. Mersky, *USMC Aviation*, p. 281.
8. ComdC, 1Jan72-30Jun72, p. 3.
9. ComdC, Aug72 p. 3.
10. LtGen Andrew W. O'Donnell, Comments on draft ms, 23Oct 86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
11. ComdC, Oct72, Tab C.
12. "Rose Garden," pp. 1-15.
13. ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun73, Tab D.

Japan Again—U.S. Again

The principal source for this period is the ComdC of VMFA-115.

1. ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun76, pt. IV.
2. LtCol Richard H. Glass, Comments on draft ms, 15Oct86 (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
3. ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec76, pt. IV.
4. ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec77, pt. IV.
5. Ibid., p. 5.
6. ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun78, p. 5.
7. ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec78, p. 1.
8. ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun79, pt. III, 1a.
9. Ibid., p. 6.
10. ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun80, p. 4.
11. ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec80, encl 5, AAR, CO VMFA-115 to CG 2d MAW, 3Jan81, p. 1.
12. ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun81, encl 1, AAR, CO VMFA-115 to CG 2d MAW, 5Feb81, p. 1.

13. ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec81, p. 5.
14. Ibid., End of Cruise Report, pp. 1-2.
15. *Jane's Aircraft*, 1978-9, p. 374.
16. ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun83, encl 2, p. 4.
17. Ibid., encl 3, p. 1.
18. *Jet Stream* (MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina), Vol. 27, No. 33, 23Aug85, p. 7.
19. MajGen Richard M. Cooke, intvw, *Amphibious Warfare Review*, (Alexandria, Va.), Vol. 3, No. 2, Nov85, p. 12.
20. Bob Jordan, "Hornet's Nest East," *Leatherneck*, Jan86, p. 39.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 60.
23. ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec85, AAR, p. 1.
24. ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec85, p. 3.
25. Facts and quotes for the entire NATO deployment are from VMFA-115 AAR for Exercises Northern Wedding/Bold Guard/Display Determination, dtd 3 and 6Nov86 (Unit File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
26. ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec86, pp. 3-5.
27. Ibid.

Appendix A

Chronology

- 1Jul43 Organized at Santa Barbara, California, as Marine Fighting Squadron 115, MBDAG-42.
- 12Feb44 Sailed on board USS *Pocomoke* (AV-9).
- 4Mar44 Arrived at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides.
- 18Apr44 Flight echelon moved to Bougainville enroute to Emirau.
- 20Apr44 Ground echelon arrived at Emirau, assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW, FMF.
- 2May44 Flight echelon arrived at Emirau.
- 3Dec44 Arrived at Leyte, Philippine Islands.
- 11-14Mar45 Moved to Zamboanga, Philippine Islands.
- 21Oct45 Left for China, arriving at Peiping 25Oct45.
- 1Apr46 Reassigned to MAG-24, 1st MAW, FMF.
- 30Dec46 Reassigned to MAG-15, AirFMFPac.
- 8Feb47 Completed deployment to MCAS Ewa, Oahu, Hawaii.
- 15Mar49 Sailed on board USS *Boxer* (CV-21) for San Diego, California.
- 1Apr49 Flight echelon arrived at MCAS Edenton, North Carolina.
- 6Apr49 Reassigned to MAG-15, 2d MAW.
- 1Aug49 Redesignated Marine Fighter Squadron 115.
- 1Apr50 Moved to MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina.
- 13Aug50 Reassigned to MAG-11, 2d MAW.
- 11-23Oct50 Deployed to NAS Guantanamo, Cuba.
- 20Nov50-
- 10Aug51 Participated in operations aboard the USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CV-42) and USS *Tarawa* (CV-40).
- 15Jan52 Embarked by train from MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina, enroute to NAS San Diego, California.
- 19Jan52 Arrived at NAS San Diego, California.
- 27Jan52 Sailed from NAS San Diego, California, to sea and foreign shore duty aboard USS *Bataan* (CVL-29).
- 11Feb52 Arrived at USNB Yokosuka, Japan disembarked and entrained for Itami AFB, Japan, arriving 12Feb.
- 20Feb52 Reassigned to MAG-33, 1st MAW, AirFMFPac.
- 29Feb52 Korean combat operations began.
- 27Apr55 Embarked by air from Yongil-man K-3 Airfield, Korea, and departed for USNS Iwakuni, Japan.
- 13May55 Embarked on board the USS *Princeton* (CVS-37) at Iwakuni, Japan, and departed for the U.S.
- 31May55 Disembarked at San Diego, California, and deployed to MCAS El Toro, Santa Ana. Reassigned to MAG-33, AirFMFPac.
- 15Sep55 Reassigned from AirFMFPac to the 3d MAW.
- 31Dec56 Redesignated Marine Fighter Squadron (All Weather) 115.
- 11Feb58 Deployed to NAS North Island, San Diego. Embarked on board the USS *Windham Bay* (CVU-92) and sailed for duty in Japan.
- 1Mar58 Arrived at NAS Atsugi, Japan, and disembarked. Reassigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW.

- 2Sep58 Ground echelon departed NAS Atsugi and arrived at USNB Yokosuka, Japan. Sailed for duty on Taiwan on board USS *Windham County* (LST-1170).
- 6Sep58 Flight echelon arrived at Pingtung North, Taiwan, to reinforce the island's air defense during the crisis over the Formosa Straits.
- 14Mar59 Ground echelon departed Pingtung North, Taiwan, for Kachsiung. Sailed on board the USS *Plumas County* (LST 1083) en route to USNB Yokosuka, Japan.
- 22Mar59 Arrived at USNB Yokosuka and disembarked for duty at NAS Atsugi, Japan.
- 4May59 Reassigned to MAG-24, 2d MAW, AirFMFLant, at MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina.
- 9Jun60 Deployment to Japan began.
- 18Jun60 Reassigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW. Based at NAS Atsugi, Japan.
- 1Jul61 Reassigned to MAG-24, 2d MAW, AirFMFLant, at MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina.
- 19Apr-27 Aug Deployed to Mediterranean on USS *Independence* (CVA-62).
- 5Dec62 Deployment to NAS Leeward Point, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for missile crisis.
- 1Jan64 Redesignated Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115.
- 7Jul65 Reassigned to MAG-13, 1st MAW, FMFPac, at NAS Atsugi, Japan.
- 12-26Jul65 Deployed to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, in preparation for movement to Republic of Vietnam.
- 30Sep-14Oct65 Deployed by elements to Da Nang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam.
- 10Oct65 Reassigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW, at Da Nang Air Base.
- 31Dec65-16Jan66 Returned by elements to MCAS Iwakuni. Reassigned to MAG-13 on 1Jan66.
- 26Feb66 Advance echelon transferred from MCAS Iwakuni to Naha AFB, Okinawa; training began 6Mar.
- 14Apr66 Relieved VMFA-314 at Da Nang and began second Vietnam tour. Reassigned to MAG-11 on 15Apr.
- 15Feb67 Departed Da Nang for MCAS Iwakuni, Japan. Reassigned to MAG-15.
- 14-15May67 Flight echelon deployed to Chu Lai, Vietnam, and began third Vietnam tour. Reassigned to MAG-13.
- 24Aug70 Deployed to Da Nang. Reassigned to MAG-11.
- 1Mar71 Returned to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan. Reassigned to MAG-15.
- 6Apr72 Deployed to Da Nang for fourth Vietnam tour. Reassigned to MAG-15 (Forward).
- 16Jun72 Deployed to Nam Phong, Thailand, as part of MAG-15.
- 31Aug73 Left Nam Phong and deployed to Naha AFB, Okinawa.
- 17Dec73 Deployed to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan.
- Oct76 Deployed to Amberley, Australia.
- 22Jul-11Aug77 Deployed to MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina. Reassigned to MAG-31, 2d MAW, FMFLant, 10Aug.
- 30Aug-16 Sep79 Deployed to USNS Keflavik, Iceland, via Goose Bay, Labrador.
- 25Oct-16Dec80 Embarked on board USS *Forrestal* (CV-59) for cruise to Caribbean.

- 1Mar81 Embarked on board USS *Forrestal* (CV-59) for Mediterranean cruise.
- 18-19Aug81 Engagements with Libyan MiGs.
- 15Sep81 Returned to MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina.
- 1Jul85 VMFA-115 received first F/A-18 Hornet planes.
- 25Sep-
- 20Oct86 Deployed to Denmark, Italy, and Turkey in NATO exercises.

Plane Chronology

Jul43	.....	SNJ-4
Jul43	.....	F4U-1 and FG-1
Jul44	.....	FG-1A
Dec44	.....	F4U-1D
Apr45	.....	FG-1D
Sep45	.....	F4U-4
Sep49	.....	F9F-2
Dec50	.....	F9F-2B
Aug51	.....	F9F-4
Apr53	.....	F9F-5
Apr55	.....	F4D (F-6A)
Sep63	.....	F-4B
Aug75	.....	F-4J
Aug82	.....	F-4S
Jul85	.....	F/A-18

Appendix B

Commanding Officers

Maj John S. MacLaughlin	1Jul43 – 16Jul43
Maj Joseph J. Foss	17Jul43 – 20Sep44
Maj John H. King, Jr.	21Sep44 – 29May45
Maj John S. Payne	30May45 – 17Aug45
Maj Thomas M. Coles	18Aug45 – 8Mar46
Capt Fred J. Gilhuly (acting)	9Mar46 – 14May46
Maj John E. Reynolds	15May46 – 16Aug46
Maj Harry B. Hooper	17Aug46 – 6Nov46
LtCol Gordon H. Knott	7Nov46 – 8Jun47
Maj Thomas O. Bales	9Jun47 – 31Jul47
LtCol Monfurd K. Peyton	1Aug47 – 10May48
Maj James A. Feeley, Jr.	11May48 – 27Feb49
Maj Richard R. Amerine	28Feb49 – 26Oct50
LtCol Robert G. Owens, Jr.	27Oct50 – 23Aug51
LtCol Thomas M. Coles	24Aug51 – 19May52
Maj John W. Zuber (acting)	20May52 – 5Jun52
LtCol Robert C. Armstead	6Jun52 – 15Jul52
Maj Wallace G. Wethe (acting)	16Jul52 – 17Aug52
LtCol Royce W. Coln	18Aug52 – 27Sep52
LtCol John B. Maas, Jr.	28Sep52 – 31Jan53
LtCol Stoddard G. Cortelyou	1Feb53 – 30Mar53
LtCol Joe L. Warren	31Mar53 – 4Jun53
LtCol Lynn H. Stewart	5Jun53 – 31Aug53
LtCol James E. Johnson (acting)	1Sep53 – 28Sep53
LtCol Lynn H. Stewart	29Sep53 – 4Oct53
LtCol James E. Johnson	5Oct53 – 28Feb54
LtCol Robert O. White	1Mar54 – 5Jun54
LtCol Dean S. Hartley, Jr.	6Jun54 – 13Jul54
Maj William I. Taylor	14Jul54 – 16Jul55
Maj James T. Pearce (acting)	17Jul55 – 31Aug55
LtCol John S. Flickinger	1Sep55 – 7May56
Maj Leslie E. Brown (acting)	8May56 – 17Jun56
LtCol Ralph H. Spanjer	18Jun56 – 31May57
LtCol Harold A. Langstaff, Jr.	1Jun57 – 2May59
LtCol Howard J. Finn	3May59 – 8Aug59
Maj Robert S. Hemstad	9Aug59 – 28Apr60
Maj George J. Collins (acting)	29Apr60 – 17Jun60
LtCol Robert S. Hemstad	18Jun60 – 4Jul61
LtCol John N. Swartley	5Jul61 – 31Aug61
LtCol William L. Atwater	1Sep61 – 7Sep62
LtCol Jerry B. Smith	8Sep62 – 9May63
LtCol Don W. Galbreath	10May63 – 21May64
LtCol Clement T. Corcoran	22May64 – 19Dec64
LtCol Clyde R. Jarrett	20Dec64 – 22Feb66
LtCol Dean C. Macho	23Feb66 – 7Aug66
Maj Larry R. VanDeusen	8Aug66 – 23Jan67

Maj Guy R. Campo 24Jan67 – 27Jul67
 LtCol Kenny C. Palmer 28Jul67 – 4Oct67
 LtCol Richard E. Carey 5Oct67 – 16Jan68
 LtCol Gerald W. Vaughan 17Jan68 – 12Aug68
 Maj John I. Hudson 13Aug68 – 27Nov68
 LtCol Robert R. Norton 28Nov68 – 1Jul69
 LtCol Edwin C. Paige, Jr. 2Jul69 – 31Dec69
 LtCol Donald P. Bowen 1Jan70 – 1Mar70
 LtCol John V. Cox 2Mar70 – 21Jul70
 LtCol Michael Mura 22Jul70 – 3Mar71
 LtCol Raymond R. Powell 4Mar71 – 8Dec71
 LtCol Kent A. McFerren 9Dec71 – 23Jun72
 Maj Gerald DeJong (acting) 24Jun72 – 22Jul72
 LtCol Henry C. Ivy, Jr. 23Jul72 – 1Jul73
 LtCol Charles V. V. Smillie, Jr. 2Jul73 – 19Jun74
 Maj Alec Gillespie (acting) 20Jun74 – 15Jul74
 LtCol Harvey D. Bradshaw 16Jul74 – 4Aug75
 LtCol Donald D. Wilson 5Aug75 – 16Jun76
 LtCol Richard H. Glass 17Jun76 – 2Jun77
 Maj Patrick J. Jones (acting) 3Jun77 – 29Aug77
 LtCol Robert S. Morris, Jr. 30Aug77 – 14Dec78
 LtCol Larry B. Hannah 15Dec78 – 14Dec79
 LtCol Jack B. Hammond 15Dec79 – 16Oct81
 LtCol James A. Davis 17Oct81 – 18Apr83
 LtCol John C. Church 19Apr83 – 27Jun84
 LtCol James D. Wojtasek 28Jun84 – 30Jun86
 LtCol Horace L. Logan III 1Jul86 –

Appendix C

Honors

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

PHILIPPINES
1944-1945

VIETNAM
1965-1967
1968

NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER STAR

PHILIPPINES
1945

KOREA
1952-1953

VIETNAM
1967-1968
1970
1970-1971
1972

MERITORIOUS UNIT STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

VIETNAM
1968-1970
1980-1981

ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER STAR

WORLD WAR II VICTORY STREAMER

CHINA SERVICE STREAMER

NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

KOREAN SERVICE STREAMER WITH FOUR BRONZE STARS

ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

VIETNAM SERVICE STREAMER WITH TWO SILVER AND FOUR BRONZE STARS

PHILIPPINE LIBERATION STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

PHILIPPINE REPUBLIC PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER

KOREAN PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER

VIETNAM CROSS OF GALLANTRY WITH PALM STREAMER

VIETNAM MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATION CIVIL ACTIONS STREAMER

Appendix D

Citations

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION to

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP TWELVE

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Philippine Islands from December 3, 1944, to March 9, 1945. Operating from the captured airfield at Tacloban, Marine Aircraft Group TWELVE employed Corsairs as bombing planes to strike destructive blows at escorted enemy convoys and to prevent the Japanese from reinforcing their beleaguered garrisons by landing troops and supplies on western Leyte. Undeterred by intense aerial opposition and accurate antiaircraft fire, these pilots provided effective cover for ground troops, shore installations and Fleet units and, on several occasions, when ground troops were held up by heavy enemy fire, bombed and strafed Japanese positions, thereby enabling our land forces to advance unopposed. As hostile resistance lessened on Leyte, Marine Aircraft Group TWELVE expanded its sphere of operations to strike at enemy garrisons on the Visayan Islands and southern Luzon and to support the Lingayen beachheads, neutralizing the enemy's lines of communication, his harbors, airfields and escape routes, and ranging far from base to provide aerial cover for ships of the SEVENTH Fleet and merchant-ship convoys operating in the area. During February and the early part of March, this courageous Group gave direct support to guerrilla units fighting on Cebu Island and aided in their rapid advance and the ultimate neutralization of the island. Well supported by skilled and dependable ground personnel, the gallant pilots of Marine Aircraft Group TWELVE caused the Japanese severe losses in airplanes, installations and surface craft, contributing to the achievement of air superiority so essential to the success of the campaign and thereby upholding the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

For the President:

/s/FRANCIS P. MATTHEWS,
Secretary of the Navy

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUPS, ZAMBOANGA consisting of the following Marine Aircraft Groups:

Marine Aircraft Group TWELVE	March 10-June 30, 1945
Marine Aircraft Group THIRTY TWO	March 16-June 30, 1945
Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY FOUR	April 11-June 30, 1945

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service and outstanding heroism in support of elements of the Eighth Army during operations against enemy Japanese forces on Mindanao, Philippine Islands, and in the Sulu Archipelago. After landing with the assault forces, MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUPS, ZAMBOANGA, effected wide coverage of battle areas in flights made extremely hazardous by dense jungles, precipitous cloud-obscured mountains and adverse weather conditions. The gallant officers and men of these Groups penetrated hostile defenses to press relentless attacks and reduce vital enemy targets, disrupt communications and troop concentrations, and destroy ammunition and fuel dumps despite intense antiaircraft fire over Japanese objectives. The vital service rendered during these campaigns in providing convoy cover, fighter defense and close aerial support of ground forces is evidence of the courage, skill and devotion to duty of the pilots, aircrewmen and ground personnel operating as a well coordinated team, and reflects the highest credit upon MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUPS, ZAMBOANGA, and the United States Naval Service. All personnel attached to and serving with Marine Aircraft Groups 12, 32 or 24 during their respective periods of service as designated are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION ribbon.

/s/ FRANCIS P. MATTHEWS
Secretary of the Navy

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION. The President of the Republic of Korea takes profound pleasure in citing for outstanding and superior performance of duty

THE FIRST MARINE AIRCRAFT WING
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

The First Marine Aircraft Wing has distinguished itself in support of United Nations Forces in Korea from 27 February 1951 to 11 June 1953. During this period Marine aircraft flew over 80,000 combat sorties braving intense opposition to strike enemy fortifications, weapons and logistical installations throughout North Korea. These extensive combat operations, often conducted in hazardous weather, have provided United Nations' ground forces with unparalleled close air support and have inflicted heavy casualties and tremendous damage on enemy forces. Flying from forward Korean bases and from naval aircraft carriers, Marine aircraft have continually harassed enemy communication and transportation systems, successfully curtailing the resupply of hostile front line troops. The exceptional achievements of the officers and men of the First Marine Aircraft Wing have materially assisted the Republic of Korea in its fight for freedom. Their outstanding performance of duty reflects great credit upon themselves and is in accord with the highest traditions of military service.

The citation carries with it the right to wear the Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon by each individual member of the First Marine Aircraft Wing who served in Korea during the stated period.

/s/SYNGMAN RHEE
President

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

FIRST MARINE AIRCRAFT WING, REINFORCED

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service during operations against enemy aggressor forces in Korea from 1 August 1952 to 27 July 1953. Flying more than 45,000 combat sorties against determined opposition during this period, the First Marine Aircraft Wing, Reinforced, struck repeatedly and effectively at enemy troops, fortifications, logistical installations and lines of communication throughout North Korea. These extensive combat operations provided friendly ground forces with decisive close air support during such battles as Bunker Hill, The Hook, Reno, Carson, Vegas, Berlin and East Berlin, and inflicted heavy casualties and tremendous damage upon the enemy. Operating from naval aircraft carriers and from forward Korean bases, Marine aircraft continually harassed enemy communication and transportation systems, curtailing the movement of hostile troops to the front lines, and provided the air defense of South Korea. The notable record achieved by the First Marine Aircraft Wing, Reinforced, is an eloquent tribute to the resourcefulness, courage and stamina of all her gallant officers and men. Their inspiring and unyielding devotion to duty in the fulfillment of these vital tasks reflect the highest credit upon themselves and the United States Naval Service.

All personnel attached to and serving with the First Marine Aircraft Wing, Reinforced, during the above period, or any part thereof, are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION RIBBON. This includes all organic units and the following reinforcing units: Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 1; 1st 90mm Anti-Aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion; and Ground Control Approach Unit 41M.

/s/CHARLES S. THOMAS
Secretary of the Navy

CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION. Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing
takes pleasure in commending

MARINE FIGHTER ATTACK SQUADRON 115
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for

Outstanding performance of duty and meritorious achievement by the members of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 in support of combat activities in the Republic of Vietnam during the period 15 May 1967 to 1 June 1967. The outstanding close air support supplied by the members of this Squadron, coupled with the exemplary manner in which they have brought about the destruction of enemy supplies, supply and infiltration routes, ammunition dumps and fortresses is highly commendable. The aggressive spirit which pervades in this Squadron reflects credit upon each member and denotes the professionalism, initiative, self-sacrifice and devotion to duty that exists throughout this Squadron. The teamwork, ingenuity and dedication by the members of this Squadron have been in keeping with the highest standards of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

/s/LOUIS B. ROBERTSHAW
Major General, U.S. Marine Corps

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION to the

FIRST MARINE AIRCRAFT WING

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in action against the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong forces in the Republic of Vietnam from 11 May 1965 to 15 September 1967. Throughout this period, the First Marine Aircraft Wing, operating in I and II Corps tactical zones of the Republic of Vietnam, North Vietnam, and adjacent waters, sought out and destroyed determined enemy forces and provided combat air support to ground forces of the Free World and the Republic of Vietnam. Participating in 195 major operations, and thousands of other attacks, the Wing continuously and aggressively carried the battle to the elusive enemy in bitterly contested actions. Operations such as Double Eagle, Harvest Moon, Starlite, Hastings, Prairie, Union, Hickory, Cochise, and Swift, reflect the high degree of superior airmanship, valor, devotion to duty and professionalism exhibited by personnel of the Wing. Although heavily committed to increased combat operations, the Wing developed and successfully employed new weapons, tactics, and procedures against the hard-core communist forces with gratifying results. Through the aggressive actions of the Wing, military and political victories were denied the insurgent communist forces, thereby providing a more stable atmosphere for the legally constituted Government of the Republic of Vietnam. The establishment and logistical support of many separate airfields throughout the I Corps tactical zone and the vital air supply support provided the III Marine Amphibious Force and its allied ground forces, was a tribute to the resourcefulness and determination of the Wing. This dependable support was provided under the most trying and difficult combat conditions. Flying in fair weather and foul, against a fanatical, well-armed enemy, the uncommon courage and intrepidity of the Marine pilots and supporting Wing personnel, acting in a concerted team effort, contributed to another glorious chapter in an already illustrious history. The valor, devotion to duty, aggressive spirit, professionalism, and ingenuity of the entire First Marine Aircraft Wing in battle against a well trained, dangerous, and determined enemy, reflected the highest degree of heroism and exemplary performance, and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

/s/LYNDON B. JOHNSON

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION to

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP THIRTEEN

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service while based at Chu Lai, Republic of Vietnam from 15 September 1967 to 30 April 1968. With its efforts directed toward air-to-ground ordnance delivery in support of U.S. Marine and Allied ground operations in Vietnam, Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN carried on combat operations during all types of weather conditions utilizing the exceptionally versatile F4B aircraft. Dedicated and skillful aircrews of the Group amassed 14,230 combat sorties and delivered 28,393 tons of ordnance on enemy positions while providing close air support for 60 major operations. The exceptional airmanship and accurate ordnance delivery of these aircrews accounted for 751 confirmed enemy dead, 3,581 structures destroyed, 1,242 bunkers destroyed, 5,420 meters of trenchline destroyed, 103 AAA/AW positions and 94 rocket and mortar positions destroyed. During the *Tet* Offensive which began on 31 January 1968, the officers and men of Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN displayed remarkable courage, dogged determination, and superb teamwork. Despite extremely poor weather associated with monsoon rains, the Group's aircraft launched on numerous emergency missions to aid Marine and Allied forces during Operation Hue City and delivered 125 tons of ordnance with pinpoint accuracy on the entrenched enemy gunners. During the siege of Khe Sanh a North Vietnamese Army of 40,000 completely surrounded the small airfield. Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN provided essential close air support throughout the siege, often delivering ordnance right up to the airfield's perimeter to stop enemy forces threatening to breach the wire. Despite the heavy enemy antiaircraft fire, low ceilings and poor visibility in the mountainous terrain, the valiant crews delivered their ordnance precisely on target to protect their fellow Marines. This outstanding close air support was culminated with Operation Pegasus in March, allowing friendly forces to link up with the beleaguered Marines at Khe Sanh. Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN aircrews delivered 1,000 tons of ordnance in support of Operation Kingfisher in and immediately north of the Demilitarized Zone, resulting in pinpoint destruction of heavily camouflaged North Vietnamese Army rocket, mortar and artillery positions which were heavily bombarding Marine ground forces in the Con Thien—Gio Linh—Dong Ha—Cam Lo quadrangle. Through the Civic Action and Personal Response Programs, Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN played an important and vital role in the war to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. The Group provided materials and supervisory assistance to the Vietnamese for the completion of numerous public improvements, including a vigorously pursued sanitation and hygiene program, and building projects. The people were provided with helpful new ideas for increasing their standard of living through numerous small industrial and agricultural projects. Money, clothing, school and household supplies were donated to the Vietnamese by the Group and also by interested persons in the United States through the efforts of Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN personnel. By its unparalleled accomplishments, unexcelled teamwork, and exceptional professional competence, Ma-

rine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN contributed substantially to the success of American efforts in the Republic of Vietnam. Its exceptional accomplishments were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and United States Naval Service.

All personnel attached to and serving with Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN consisting of the following units, during the period 15 September 1967 to 30 April 1968 are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon:

. . . Marine Fighter-Attack Squadron 115

/s/JOHN H. CHAFEE
Secretary of the Navy

By virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States and as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States, I have today awarded THE PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (NAVY) for Extraordinary Heroism to

FIRST MARINE REGIMENT (REINFORCED),
FIRST MARINE DIVISION (REINFORCED),
FLEET MARINE FORCE

For exceptionally meritorious and heroic achievement during the period 20 November to 9 December 1968 in connection with operations against enemy forces in Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam. Participating in Operation Meade River, a combined operation in support of the Government of Vietnam's Accelerated Pacification Campaign, the First Marine Regiment (Reinforced) skillfully utilized foot and motor transportation, along with the largest assault helicopter lift in Marine Corps history, to successfully emplace a cordon around an eleven-square-mile area from which civilian populace was evacuated for screening by province and district agencies. Following the establishment of the virtually impenetrable cordon, the Marines commenced to fan out from their positions along the eastern edge of the encirclement to conduct a systematic sweep and search operation in order to ferret out the entrapped enemy. For the next several days, the First Marine Regiment (Reinforced) relentlessly pressed the attack in a series of intense and fierce engagements against an extremely stubborn foe, resulting in a resounding victory for the friendly forces and extensive enemy losses in personnel, supplies and equipment. By their superb professionalism, valiant fighting spirit, and unflagging devotion to duty throughout Operation Meade River, the officers and men of the First Marine Regiment (Reinforced) made a significant contribution to United States efforts in Southeast Asia and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.

/s/RICHARD NIXON

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the MERITORIOUS UNIT COMMENDATION to

MARINE FIGHTER ATTACK SQUADRON ONE HUNDRED FIFTEEN

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For meritorious achievement while participating in combat operations in Southeast Asia from 10 November 1968 to 20 May 1970 as an element of Marine Aircraft Group Thirteen, First Marine Aircraft Wing. Marine Fighter Attack Squadron One Hundred Fifteen contributed significantly to the combat mission of the III Marine Amphibious Force and the Seventh Air Force by conducting numerous successful close and direct air support missions against heavily defended enemy military and logistic installations in North Vietnam and the multitude of hostile targets in and around the Republic of Vietnam. Through their continuous display of professionalism, pride, determination, resourcefulness, and effectiveness, the officers and men of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron One Hundred Fifteen made a major contribution toward the significant achievement of Free World objectives in Southeast Asia. The performance of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron One Hundred Fifteen was in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

For the Secretary of the Navy:

/s/R. E. CUSHMAN, JR.
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION to

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP THIRTEEN

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service from 28 February 1969 to 1 June 1970 while conducting around-the-clock operations from Chu Lai Air Base, Republic of Vietnam, against enemy aggressor forces. During this period, Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN compiled an outstanding record of combat achievement despite the many difficulties created by tropical heat and humidity and the hazards attendant to monsoon rains. In addition to the success achieved in directing its efforts toward air-to-ground ordnance delivery in support of ground operations, the group provided excellent air cover in support of U.S. Seventh Fleet and Seventh Air Force operations. Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN was equally successful in winning the esteem of the Vietnamese people, contributing substantially to U.S. goals through an active and progressive Civic Action and Personal Response Program. The outstanding professionalism, teamwork, and dedication displayed by the officers and men of Marine Aircraft Group THIRTEEN reflected great credit upon themselves, the Marine Corps, and the United States Naval Service.

. . . VMFA-115, 21May-1June70

/s/JOHN W. WARNER
Secretary of the Navy

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION to

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP ELEVEN

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service from 1 November 1970 to 10 June 1971 during sustained combat operations against enemy forces in Southeast Asia. Tasked with complex and highly hazardous combat commitments under difficult conditions and round-the-clock operations, Marine Aircraft Group Eleven compiled an enviable record of combat successes throughout this period. The officers and men of the group consistently demonstrated a high degree of courage, aggressiveness, and professionalism in the employment of a wide variety of fixed-wing aircraft while carrying out a myriad of successful missions against heavily defended enemy military forces, logistic installations, and lines of communication. In the area of civic action and "people to people" programs, the personnel of Marine Aircraft Group Eleven provided material and personal services for a wide variety of community projects, thereby earning an immeasurable amount of good will and contributing greatly to the welfare of the people of the Republic of Vietnam. By their exemplary performance, the officers and men of Marine Aircraft Group Eleven made a major contribution toward the achievement of United States objectives in Southeast Asia and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

/s/JOHN H. CHAFEE
Secretary of the Navy

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION to

TASK FORCE DELTA

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service from 23 May 1972 to 31 December 1972 in support of U.S. military operations in Southeast Asia. Commencing an unprecedented airbase construction and operational schedule in the face of torrential rains, sweltering heat and countless other obstacles, Task Force Delta succeeded in meeting seemingly impossible operational deadlines. The first combat aircraft arrived within three weeks of the beginning of construction, and continuous air operations commenced the next day. Around-the-clock operations included air-to-ground close air support, fighter barrier combat air patrols and night systems bombing. Almost immediately, daily sortie rates were equaling those expected of an air group operating from a sophisticated, permanent base. Through their superlative performance, the personnel of Task Force Delta contributed significantly toward supporting the South Vietnamese counteroffensive as well as the U.S. air offensive of 1972. Their courage, professionalism and inspiring devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

/s/JOHN W. WARNER
Secretary of the Navy

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the MERITORIOUS UNIT COMMENDATION to

MARINE FIGHTER ATTACK SQUADRON 115

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For meritorious service while serving in support of the overall combat readiness posture of Carrier Air Wing SEVENTEEN, USS *Forrestal*, and the United States Navy from 3 October 1980 to 13 September 1981. Commencing their cruise with a paucity of previous carrier experience, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 115's drive to learn plus their demand for perfection derived great dividends. During the squadron certification for day and night carrier operations, VMFA-115 received a noteworthy cumulative grade of 3.51. While participating in the USS *Forrestal* Operation Readiness Evaluation (ORE), the Squadron was assigned a grade of excellent. Additionally, VMFA-115's officers created a comprehensive AAW TACNOTE (Operation Plan) which is forming the basis for full spectrum anti-air warfare planning, conduct, and coordination within the Battle Group. Upon entry into the Mediterranean, the pace of operations accelerated with highly successful participation in a joint task force [missile exercise] at Salto di Quierra Missile Range; Exercise Daily Double, a combined U.S., Greek, and Italian naval operation; Encounterex TF-61; and Exercise Dual Dagger, a joint U.S. and French air/sea exercise. While on a open-ocean missile exercise in the Gulf of Sidra off Libya in conjunction with USS *Nimitz*, VMFA-115's aircraft successfully intercepted numerous sections of armed Libyan fighter aircraft and precluded any from penetrating their CAPS or reaching USS *Forrestal*. This exercise, with its attendant intercepts of Libyan aircraft, was a challenge that was met successfully as a result of an enormous amount of work, dedication, and sacrifice. By their outstanding technical competence, astute professionalism, and steadfast devotion to duty, the officers and enlisted personnel of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 reflected credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and United States Naval Service.

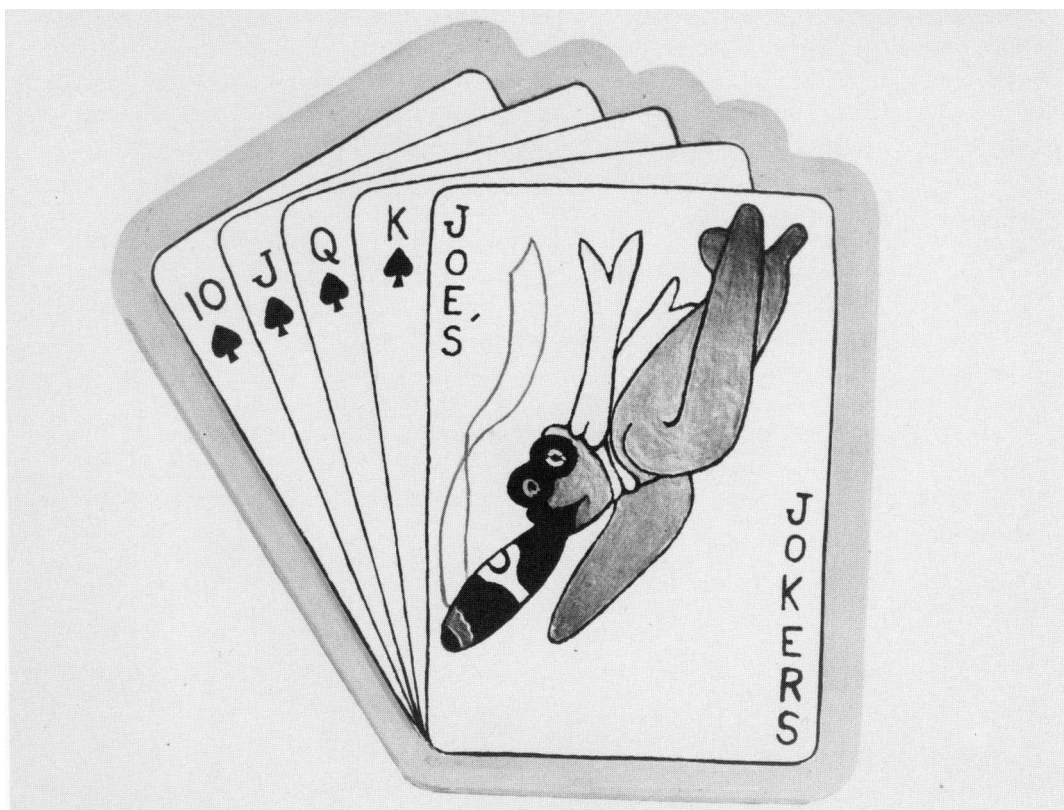
/s/JOHN LEHMAN
Secretary of the Navy

Appendix E

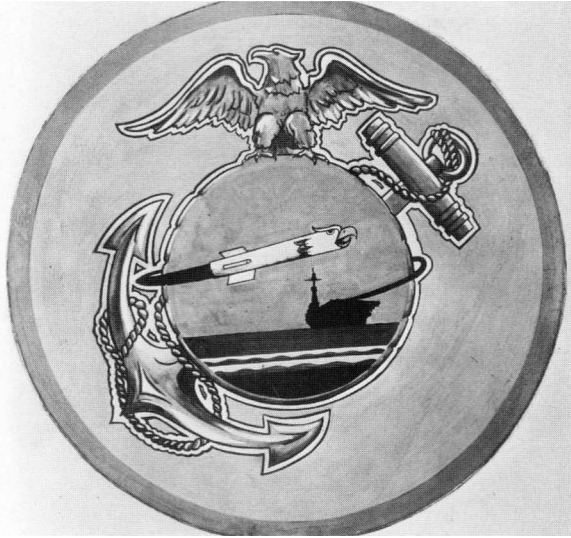
Squadron Insignia

As might be expected in a squadron which has been on active duty for nearly 45 years, its distinctive insignia have undergone a variety of changes. In a letter on 28 September 1944 to the Chief of Naval Operations, the commanding officer of VMF-115 explained the earliest one adopted:

The insignia proposed by Marine Fighting Squadron One Fifteen depicts both the squadron and its original commanding officer. Upon request, the insignia was drawn by the Walt Disney studios with an eye to originality. The center of interest is an aircraft, similar to the one flown by this squadron, smoking a cigar. The plane, humorous in design, is exemplary of the squadron itself, and the cigar pays tribute to Major Joe Foss' ever-present "stogie." The name was chosen by popular vote, and itself shows the manner with which this squadron attacks the problems of aerial warfare: earnestly intent and yet in high spirits.



1944



1951



1956

On 14 March 1951 the squadron's commanding officer submitted for approval a new design, indicating the 1944 insignia was "obsolete." For the first time, an eagle (continued in various forms to the present day) was included. This new emblem was "intended to present triphibious capabilities of this fighter squadron. Capable of operating either from carrier or land bases as represented by beach, its striking power, which is symbolized by the rocket, has no geographic limitation."

The next change came in a letter from the CNO to VMF-115 on 20 August 1956. This followed the logic of the squadron's adoption of the nickname "Able Eagles" on 14 April 1952: "The modex letters of Marine Fighter Squadron 115 are A.E. Thus the large A in the background of the design. The Eagle is representative of the letter E. Thus the Squadron modex letters are represented by a simple readily identifiable insignia."

Again, in a letter on 30 April 1958, the CNO authorized a new insignia. This emblem featured a diving eagle superimposed on diagonal red, white, and blue stripes.

Finally, on 14 February 1986, the CNO approved the current insignia for the "Silver Eagles" (although the nickname dated back to 1959). This design has a dark blue background, a white shield, and a silver eagle with a red, white, and blue stripe behind it.

1958



1986



Appendix F

Plane Markings

During 1956 and into mid-1957 the squadron applied distinctive markings to its Skyrajs. These consisted of red, white, and blue bands on the wing tips, drop tanks, and near the top of the fin and rudder. During this time period, the VMF(AW)-115 insignia featured a diving eagle superimposed over a large capital "A." This insignia was supposed to depict the squadron modex letter "AE" through the use of the "A" and the eagle. (This combination symbolized the earlier adoption, on 14 April 1952, of the nickname "Able Eagles.")

By April 1957, VMF(AW)-115 had been ordered to change its modex to "VE". This repainting job occurred gradually, with the squadron flying its Skyrajs with both markings for some time afterward. With this modex change came a second trio of red, white, and blue bands carried below the tail code, the colors of these being reversed from the top tail bands. A revised squadron insignia was approved on 30 April 1958. This emblem featured a diving eagle superimposed on diagonal red, white, and blue stripes.

At Cherry Point, in May 1959, a few of VMF(AW)-114's brightly colored planes were taken over by VMF(AW)-115 with no change in markings. These Skyrajs now sported a day-glo orange spine that continued rearward, tapering up the tail and downward on the fuselage. The drop tanks also featured day-glo designs along with the unit designation, tail code, and nose numbering painted in black on each side. (It is doubtful whether the "Silver Eagles" carried these day-glo markings on their Skyrajs for much more than a year.)

For the tour on the *Independence* in 1962 the squadron's planes were painted in their most flamboyant markings: their traditional red, white, and blue bands on the tail and drop tanks were supplemented by the first appearance of the squadron insignia, which was carried on the "turtle back" with a red wing trailing behind it. A red "arrow" outlined in black adorned the white rudder, while the air group's "AG" tail code was carried along with "USS *Independence*" on the rear fuselage.*

*See Nicholas M. Williams, "VMFA-115," *Journal of the American Aviation Historical Society* (Santa Ana, California), Summer 1978, pp. 133, 140.

Appendix G

List of Reviewers

LtGen Leslie E. Brown, USMC (Ret)
LtGen John I. Hudson, USMC
LtGen Andrew W. O'Donnell, USMC (Ret)
MajGen John V. Cox, USMC (Ret)

Col William L. Atwater, USMC (Ret)
Col Stoddard G. Cortelyou, USMC (Ret)
Col Don W. Galbreath, USMC (Ret)
Col Howard J. Finn, USMC (Ret)
Col Fred J. Gilhuly, USMC (Ret)

Col Harry B. Hooper, Jr., USMC (Ret)
Col James E. Johnson, USMC (Ret)
Col Gordon H. Knott, USMC (Ret)
Col John B. Maas, Jr., USMC (Ret)
Col Kenny C. Palmer, USMC (Ret)

Col John S. Payne, USMC (Ret)
Col William L. Shanks, Jr., USMC (Ret)
Col Charles V. V. Smillie, Jr., USMC (Ret)

LtCol Donald P. Bowen, USMC (Ret)
LtCol Thomas M. Coles, USMC (Ret)
LtCol Richard H. Glass, USMC (Ret)
LtCol Harold A. Langstaff, Jr., USMC (Ret)
LtCol Horace L. Logan III, USMC

LtCol Michael Mura, USMC (Ret)
LtCol Jerry B. Smith, USMC (Ret)
LtCol Lynn H. Stewart, USMC (Ret)

Maj William I. Taylor, USMC (Ret)

A squadron insignia of VMFA-115 is shown on the back cover. For a history of the insignia and other illustrations see Appendix E.

